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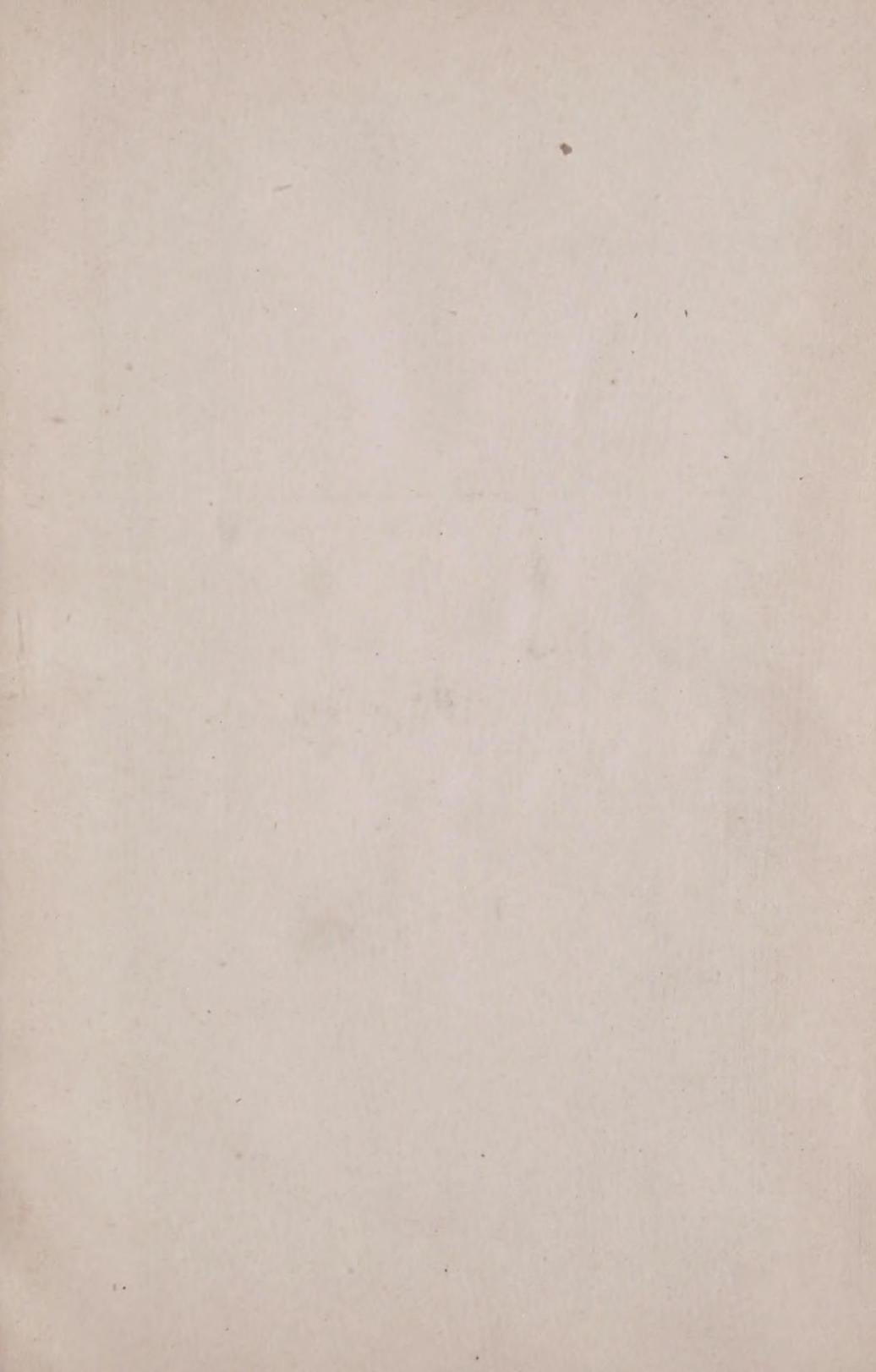
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Married by the Mayor;

OR,

THE DARK PAGE IN HIS LIFE.

BY MRS. H. C. HOFFMAN.

NEW YORK:
NORMAN L. MUNRO, PUBLISHER,
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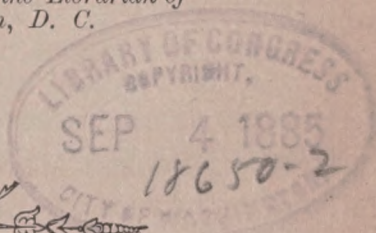
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THE DARK PAGE IN HIS LIFE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW OF A WOMAN.

"Ah, the very man I was thinking about!" said Henry Leighton with a little start as, standing at the window, he saw a gentleman leave the steps and make his way down the long avenue to the gate. "I wonder why Sarah asked him here? I don't know why it is, but I don't like that man—I don't like his attentions to—I'll send for her and speak to her about it. I think it is my duty to do it. Poor little girl, she hasn't a relative in the world. I won't put it off any longer. No use of leaving it for Sarah to do; she may not be home for several days," and Mr. Leighton stepped from the window and touched the bell.

"Say to Miss Forrest I would like to see her a few minutes if she is not engaged," said Mr. Leighton to the servant who appeared in answer to his ring.

Edna Forrest would have been engaged when Mr. Leighton's message was brought to her in the drawing-room, had she permitted herself to be. She was having an "encounter" for the fifth time to-day with Vere Gordon when the servant from Mr. Leighton came to her rescue.

"Miss Forrest, I want you to look over a few water-

colors I have here, and tell me what you think of them," Vere Gordon had said as he laid his portfolio on a little stand beside Edna.

Vere Gordon's manner might mislead a careless observer.

His air was debonair, though his tone was matter-of-fact; just now it was commanding, and while his face was stern there was a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"You *want* me to look over your water-colors!" said Miss Forrest, rising.

She drew herself up, elevated her chin, but she wasn't very tall at that. She was lithe and slim, though promising to be much taller, for her growing days were scarcely over, as she was not yet seventeen.

The uplifted chin and the large brown eyes raised to his face were a sure sign of scorn and defiance, yet Vere Gordon was not annihilated. His features did not relax, but the twinkle in the blue eyes deepened until they brimmed full of laughter as he bowed low before her and said:

"Pardon, Miss Forrest, will you *be kind enough* to look over my poor efforts and pass judgment upon them."

"Indeed, sir, my opinion would not be worth the saying; even my taste for the fine arts is, as yet, very far from being formed—but here comes Miss Taunton. I haven't a doubt you will take great pleasure in showing them to her, as she is competent to pass judgment upon them."

"Yes," Vere said with great solemnity, "I will take great pleasure in showing my work to Cora Taunton, for she is *way up* in everything—all New York girls are."

Edna's color grew brighter, and in spite of her she revealed a little temper, and a sneer.

"Oh, New York represents all the wealth and all the culture of this country?" and a derisive little laugh followed the question.

"Poor New York," said Vere with the same solemn face; "but I wouldn't show my jealousy if I were you."

"Mr. Gordon, I am sorry that I am compelled to explain to you that I know my place too well, and indeed am of too humble a spirit, to be jealous of any of Mr. Leighton's guests. If my speech is plain to rudeness, will you be kind enough to remember that I am only hired at so

many dollars a month to be in this drawing-room, and my advantages have been few."

"But you made a very great deal of them," said Vere, in a most matter-of-fact voice.

At this moment the servant approached to tell Edna Mr. Leighton wanted her, and Cora Taunton, the New York belle, having stopped to speak to one of the guests, a number of whom were in the large drawing-room, was again making her way toward Vere and Edna.

"I have been called away at a most opportune moment. I can now gracefully make way for your brilliant New York friend."

"Oh, you poor little Philadelphian!" and Vere gave her a look full of pity and a shake of the head that made her think he believed her case a hopeless one,

"Philadelphians are not in need of your pity, sir," and with a toss of her head she left him.

The twinkle died out of his eyes as they followed the slim figure. When she disappeared across the threshold he stepped to a window close by and looked out, and a few moments later his thoughts were disturbed by a little hand resting on his arm.

"What did you say to offend her royal highness, Mr. Gordon?"

Vere Gordon looked down at Cora Taunton's handsome face; the flash of her eyes had a power that, for most men, was irresistible. This New York belle who had come up from Cape May with Mr. Leighton and his sister, Miss Sarah Leighton, was considered handsome, brilliant, dashing; but there is a shorter description in our mind that will fit her exactly—Miss Cora Taunton was *fast*.

"And pray who is her royal highness?" and the eyes that looked down at Cora had a most innocent expression.

"Why our *charming hostess*, of course," said Cora, with open sarcasm.

"Oh, did she look offended? Well, how stupid of me not to have seen it. Now you speak of it, I believe we *did* disagree about my drawings here."

"Oh, have you some sketches of your own here?—may I look at them?" and she still kept her hand on his arm.

"Certainly; though I promise you if you look over them faithfully you will be very much bored. Ah, as I

live, here comes Clifford! Now, that is strange! I supposed he was in New York, and I was wishing him here but a few moments ago when you spoke to me. Will you excuse me, Miss Taunton, I have something very important to say to him. Shall I leave you my portfolio?"

"Oh, yes, I shall be delighted!" cried Cora; but she looked anything but delighted when Vere left her and hurried out to meet the young man coming up the avenue.

"Clifford," said Gordon, after the first salute, "I'm glad you've come. I couldn't stand it here another day. I was going back to New York to-morrow expressly for the purpose of seeing you. I tell you, Clifford, my position is becoming unbearable."

Gordon spoke quickly—excitedly. You would scarcely recognize him as the calm young gentleman who tortured Edna Forrest.

Richard Clifford looked as if he felt ill at ease. The bright pink left his fair face. His eyes wandered from his friend. You could see at a glance that this young man had not a particle of confidence in himself.

"Dick, this thing must come to an end some time——"

"I know it," interrupted Clifford.

"If you are not tired, let us take a little walk. We can talk without fear of interruption and get back in time to dress for dinner."

It was a lovely day in November, somewhat chilly now that the sun was disappearing. The young men walked briskly down the avenue. Their step was quickened by the sense of chill or an anxiety perhaps to get away from the house.

There was a striking difference in these two friends, as they walked along the quiet road in a suburb of Philadelphia. Vere Gordon, tall, broad-shouldered, handsome, showed his natural temperament now, perhaps. His blue eyes were restless and had an expression of deep pain, and every tone and movement indicated the impetuous man. Clifford was about Gordon's age, twenty-three; he was uneasy too, but it was the uneasiness of a quiet man. He was not as tall as his companion, neither had he the breadth nor strength. There was never a woman fairer than Clifford. Tawny hair and mustache, china blue eyes, and skin of pink and white. They were dif-

ferent, indeed, yet never were two young men more closely knit in the ties of friendship.

"It's the dark page in my life," said Gordon, abruptly.

"Oh, Heaven, don't say that," said Clifford with much feeling.

"I can't help saying it, for I feel it. When we were leaving England, I felt that I had turned to the dark page in my book. Travel, new faces and new friends made me forget the feeling for a time, but it has come back to me, and it grows stronger every hour I remain in that house. Think of it, being taken into the bosom of a family. Think of what a fraud I am. What will I be thought of when I am found out. Dick, I'll go away; then you can tell the truth."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Vere, do not take that step yet," said Clifford, deeply agitated.

"Dick," and Gordon stopped in the road and put his hand on Clifford's shoulder, "let me go while I am strong enough to go."

Dick did not answer, and Gordon spoke again in his abrupt way.

"Are you expected at the house? What did you come down for?"

"I don't know that I am expected to-day, but I have a standing invitation to come down before my New York friends go home."

"So you came down expressly to see your New York friends—me, for instance," and there was a tinge of bitterness in Vere's tone.

"Yes, I came down to see you," and Clifford laughed, thinking he might turn his friend's thoughts from the "dark page."

"Yes, you did," said the other mockingly. "Come, Dick, let us have no secrets between us at this late day. Own that you could not stay away from Edna Forrest," and he fixed his eyes piercingly on his friend as he tried to read his thoughts in the gathering gloom.

Clifford blushed to the roots of his hair, and his surprise was very natural, as he said:

"Edna Forrest! Oh, come now, Gordon, you know better than that."

"No shamming!" cried Gordon; "Dick, let us be honest,"

"By Jove, this is funny," said Clifford, "for you of all men to accuse me of loving Edna Forrest! Why, at Cape May, it was believed *you* were the man. 'Pon my honor I heard that report."

"Bah," said Gordon, with a sneer, "such a report could only have been made on the strength of our quarrels."

"No, on the strength that true love never runs smooth," laughed Dick.

"Clifford, you are evading me; you have not yet answered my question."

"Well, then, I will answer you now with pleasure. I never had a thought of Edna Forrest. Indeed, it is no wonder I have made no progress in my love-making, when my bosom friend cannot see with whom I am in love. I love Cora Taunton with all my soul. That is why I could not stay in New York. And now, Vere, since you know the truth, I beg of you to let things remain as they are for the present. Cora has wealth, beauty, all the attractions that bring numberless admirers. If she select me from the numberless, she will select me for myself. That is why I want you——"

"Enough," said Vere, clasping his friend's hand. "I will make no more complaints for the present." The expression in his face had changed, and he said, as if speaking to himself, though loud enough for his friend to hear him, "It is Cora Taunton!"

Clifford laughed.

"I don't see how you ever got Edna Forrest into your head—naturally enough, though, since you think so much about her," concluded Clifford with a sly look at his friend's face.

Vere's expression changed again. This time he frowned.

"Yes, I think of her sometimes. She annoys me a great deal," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "My! how dark it is getting! and here we have walked down to the Schuylkill; we have got quite a walk back, and we have to dress for dinner."

He turned abruptly as he spoke, and Clifford, following his example, said:

"Now if you had accused Marcus Tremaine of being

in love with Miss Forrest, I would agree with you at once."

"Oh, Marcus Tremaine!" said Vere, impatiently. "Do you suppose Edna Forrest would give a second thought to such a brute as Marcus Tremaine?"

"A *brute!*" and Clifford laughed. "Why, he is a lion; he has millions, my boy, and all New York is at his feet."

"Yes, that is just like New York; how I despise it!" said Vere, bitterly. "A man must have millions or he is nobody with New Yorkers. We are foreigners, you know, Dick, and as an unbiased observer, you will not blame me if I decide in favor of the cultured Philadelphian, who still believes that true worth has more claim to his respect than have your Marcus Tremaines with their millions."

"I agree with you, Vere. New York is a thoroughbred worshiper of the golden calf."

"What is that?" exclaimed Vere, starting back.

They had reached the gate again, and Vere Gordon saw something that *startled* him, to say the least.

"What," said Clifford.

"I thought I saw the shadow of a woman rising from a crouching position," said Vere, and his face turned a ghastly color.

"The shadow of a *woman!* Well, that isn't anything strange; this is not a deserted spot, you know; but really I don't see any woman," said Clifford, looking around in the faint light. "You must be nervous, Vere."

"I must be," and something like a shudder passed over Vere, "but I could swear——" and Vere paused and looked around, but no sight or sound rewarded his inquiry. "Well, I saw something that looked like a crouching woman in the act of rising, and it chilled my blood—reminded me of a tiger or a panther—I don't mind meeting a solid body, but I hate to be taken by surprise."

He passed in at the gate and did not speak again, though Clifford, following him, laughed and said:

"A vivid imagination, Vere!"

CHAPTER II.

HER CHAMPION.

"I HAVE a few things to say to you, my dear child," said Mr. Leighton in his fatherly way, when Edna Forrest came in. "Sit here," and he pushed an ottoman on the hearth rug and placed his own chair beside it.

She took the seat he placed for her, but he did not sit down at once. He walked across the room, and turning back looked steadily at the girl sitting on the hearth where the light of the burning logs fell upon her. He always admired this little companion of his sister. How beautiful he thought her this moment. The room was gloomy enough to make the firelight ruddy, and Edna's auburn hair grew brighter, her cheeks pinker, and the brown eyes glowed like stars.

"You wish to say something to me, sir?" said Edna, looking at Mr. Leighton as if she thought he did not like to speak. "I am not a satisfactory hostess. Indeed, sir, you needn't mind telling me—you know I *told you* that I was not fitted for the honor, and I would not bear it gracefully."

"My dear child, I have not a *single fault* to find with you *there!*" and the "there" brought Mr. Leighton's hand on the auburn curls. "You are simply a charming young hostess, and that is one of the things I wanted to say to you; and I don't know, with all these guests on my hands, and Sarah running off to her sick friend, what I should ever have done without you. And now, Edna, I want to say to you—and remember not one word of it is flattery—to flatter a girl of your age would be doing you a great wrong, and I only want to help you toward an end which is good. You will make as brilliant a woman as any in our set if you will make the most of the next few years, if—if——"

Mr. Leighton hesitated and coughed.

"If what, Mr. Leighton? I know that you are for my good and you need not hesitate," said Edna.

"Well, my dear child, if you will not permit men's attention to turn your head. Now this is the most important thing I had to say to you," said Mr. Leighton, plunging boldly in as he had broken the ice. "I see that

the gentlemen like you. Indeed I would not advise you against accepting the attention of a man whom I thought worthy of you, but Marcus Tremaine is not. I saw him leave the house a few minutes ago, and it reminded me that I had this to say to you, *I don't like the man*, and I *know* he likes you. Wait, my dear," as Edna attempted to speak. "I know nothing particularly against him, only that he has made a large fortune by being unscrupulous in his business methods. He is a handsome **man**, but wholly without refinement. He thinks he has humbled the world because he has made his millions, and his millions can catch the purest, the loveliest, the most brilliant maiden in the land. I haven't a doubt that he is considered a great catch, and I believe Sarah thinks so, and because he was so attentive to you at Cape May, invited him here."

"Oh, sir, I hope not!" cried Edna, whose blushing face wore an expression of deep pain.

"But Mr. Leighton was right. Miss Sarah Leighton, a maiden lady of forty, was flattered by the attention of the millionaire to her poor *protegee*."

"I believe it is so," reiterated Mr. Leighton. "What else would Sarah invite the New York speculator here for? I wish we had not met him at Cape May."

The Leightons spent the latter part of the summer and nearly all the fall at Cape May, and brought home a number of guests to spend a fortnight with them.

"Indeed, you need have no regrets, sir. I don't think anything in this world would tempt me to marry Mr. Marcus Tremaine."

How very earnestly Edna said these words. With what wonderful complacency a woman says she could not be tempted, when she has never experienced the meaning of what she says!

Mr. Leighton put his hand on her head.

"What a relief to hear you say that! and I know I can trust you to keep your word, Edna."

She did not answer, and there was a silence for a moment. His hand was still upon her head. Daylight had faded out of the room. The ruddy glow of the fire fell upon them. How this November evening will come back to these two sitting here! How this moment will haunt Edna Forrest as long as life remains! She was so sure

this moment that nothing could tempt her to marry Marcus Tremaine.

"Do you know," said Mr. Leighton suddenly, "a gentleman met me on Broad Street to-day, and asked me if it were true that you were engaged to Vere Gordon. I told him that I didn't believe there was a word of truth in it. Of course, I was right?"

"Why, of course you were, Mr. Leighton. I cannot account for such a report. I am sure there isn't the slightest foundation for it."

"Well, I must differ with you," said Mr. Leighton, with a sly look at Edna. "I am sure Mr. Gordon is interested, and I have no fault to find, only I do not believe in a girl marrying at your age; you must wait, my dear——"

"Oh, Mr. Leighton, please do not entertain such an idea of Mr. Gordon; indeed, he thinks anything but well of me, and—and"—Edna rose hastily—"may I go now, it is getting very late——"

"Oh, of course, run away. I took no note of the time," said Mr. Leighton, cheerily, thinking he had embarrassed the girl.

It was well she was out of the firelight, for a tear stole down either cheek as she left the room, not daring to trust herself to speak again; but when she reached her own room, she flung herself on the bed and gave vent to her sorrow.

"Whatever makes anybody think he cares for me? He thinks me an ignorant little dependent, and he takes no pains to hide his opinion." After this she wept several minutes; then starting up, she exclaimed, "But why will I let it trouble me? Why should I care what he thinks of me? Well, I won't care. He sha'n't see—he *sha'n't*!"

An hour later, apparently calm and self-possessed, she was about to enter the drawing-room, where a number of the guests have already assembled in dinner attire.

When Edna reached the threshold she received a shock; she would gladly have beaten a retreat, but it was too late—unfortunately every face was toward her but the trio who had chosen her for a subject of conversation, rather but one had chosen to talk about her; the rest were as yet but listeners, and their faces were turned

from Edna. The young girl remained on the threshold unable to move as Cora Taunton's words greeted her:

"I wrote to mamma that Miss Forrest was our hostess, and she writes me a very amusing answer. She says she supposes it is the usual case of the beggar on horseback. She wonders what the Leightons can be thinking of to put a young hireling on a par with ladies and gentlemen."

She addressed herself directly to Vere Gordon and Richard Clifford.

Edna lost her presence of mind. She could not move for the time.

"Pardon me for disagreeing with you, Miss Taunton. Is it a social crime for a woman to be self-supporting? Are your women with wealth the only ladies of whom you can boast? If so, all I have to say is, may Heaven help your republic; as for Miss Forrest, I have only to say I feel honored to be a guest under the roof where she presides as hostess."

It was Vere Gordon who spoke, and a dead silence followed until Miss Taunton recovered herself and said:

"Oh! I am glad I gave you an opportunity to be her champion," and Cora turned away in chagrin, and squandered her smiles for the remainder of the evening on the man who thought her perfect, Richard Clifford.

If Gordon answered Cora, it was lost on Edna. To add to her embarrassment, Marcus Tremaine, burly, coarse and handsome, made himself conspicuous in his loud way as he rose to try to outdo Vere in his championship of Edna.

"Oh, here comes our charming hostess," he said, as if Edna had just appeared, and he walked over to the door and offered her his arm. "Indeed, Miss Forrest, we feel a great want when you are not here."

Edna bowed in acknowledgment of the grotesque. She saw Gordon start and turn to look at her when her name was mentioned. He wondered if she had heard. She saw Cora look and shrug her shoulders as if she did not care, and Edna's thoughts flew. Her pride, of which she had not a little, was thoroughly aroused now. She would not forget what her position demanded of her.

"It is so nice to know one is missed," she laughed, in answer to Tremaine, and the next moment she slipped away from him, and was welcoming Mr. Clifford as if noth-

ing unpleasant had happened. So perfect was her manner that the guests were relieved of their embarrassment, and some of them could not believe she had heard Cora's remarks. The situation was restored to its usual cheerfulness when Mr. Leighton and a few others came in and dinner was announced.

What an ordeal that dinner was for Edna! but she passed through it bravely. She was glad Vere Gordon was not sitting near her. She did not look at him, yet he was constantly before her, and her one thought was that he was her champion.

CHAPTER III.

HIS WIFE.

WHEN Edna returned to the drawing-room with the ladies, having left the gentlemen to their wine and talk, her feelings mastered her will. She could not endure being alone with *them*. Her nerves were stretched to their utmost tension, and feeling that any moment might come the snap, she excused herself on the plea of headache.

When she reached her room she walked the floor with a feeling of suffocation. To her the air seemed stifling, the blood in her veins afire.

"To think," she said, over and over again in her walk, "that he should say that to *her* for *me*!"

The air grew denser, her fever higher.

"I must go out. "I shall die if I remain here!"

She threw a scarf over her head and shoulders, and in a few moments she reached the grounds, and handsome grounds they were, that surrounded the home of the Philadelphia banker, and the cold air struck her burning brow and she breathed it and felt she had gained new life.

She turned into a path lined on either side by thickly growing evergreens. Here she could walk unobserved by any one coming from or approaching the house, yet she had taken but a few steps in her retreat when she suddenly became conscious of a quick footstep behind her. Instead of pausing or looking back she hurried on, and the footsteps crushing the dry leaves and twigs, hurried after her and a voice that made her heart leap, said:

"One moment, Miss Forrest."

She turned and stood still, and Vere Gordon, taking his cigar from his lips, stood before her.

"I came out for a breath of fresh air just in time to see you turn down here. Won't you catch your death of cold, with nothing but that light thing around you?"

"It felt suffocating in there, and I thought a little exercise would do me good. I hadn't a chance to run out all day," stammered Edna.

"Won't you take my arm?" he said, softly.

Edna's heart beat faster.

"Thank you, but I will go in now."

She made an attempt to pass him, but he planted himself in her path. Neither spoke. He puffed his cigar vigorously; then, as if suddenly thinking of himself, he said:

"I beg your pardon," and threw it away. "I am sorry I spoiled your walk. I am sure you would not return so soon, had I not come upon the scene. Well, it is my usual luck, eternally making myself disagreeable to you," and he laughed.

Edna's lip trembled; again that stifling sensation was upon her. She held out her hand. It lay in his a few moments before she could say:

"I am indebted to you more than I can say for your noble defense of me this evening. To say I thank you is indeed but a poor acknowledgment."

"Ah, I was afraid you heard it," he said more to himself than to her.

"I am sorry you had to offend Miss Taunton for me," faltered Edna.

"Yes, so am I sorry," he said, still holding her hand. "There should have been no occasion for her saying what she did. Clearly you are to blame. You should not occupy this position; you should be the wife of some good man, who would be able to protect you from these sneers and insults, who could put you in a position that would court the flattery even of those who envied you. Why don't you marry Tremaine?"

She tried to draw her hand from his, but he held it tightly. What a cruel speech it was! The tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Mr. Gordon, I shall never marry a man I do not love."

"Then he asked you to marry him?"

"He did, but I said nothing about it to the Leightons, as I refused him."

"What a brave little girl you are to refuse millions, but he seems to be as attentive as ever?" said Vere, eagerly.

"He would not take No for an answer. He says I will come to my senses some day. If that day ever comes, it will be the day I discover I love him."

If that day ever comes! Ah, who can boast of the morrow?

"May I go now?" she said again, trying to take her hand.

He held it more tightly as he said with a sigh that puzzled one to know whether it was genuine or pretended:

"How I wish you loved me!"

Edna looked up at him.

"Mr. Gordon, please don't make fun of me to-night. You have been too kind for me to quarrel with you."

"Make fun of you! I have never made fun of you. Been kind to you to-night! Why should I be? Is it any great praise for a man to stand up in defense of the woman he loves? Edna, I love you. You have tortured me for three months, and I can stand it no longer. To see you occupy the position you do here drives me mad. You said you could never marry the man you did not love. Oh, may I hope the day will come when you can say, 'I will be your wife.'"

The words fell from his lips in a torrent of passionate love. It was this young man's desperate way of doing things.

He permitted her to withdraw her hand from his now. She stepped back and looked at him. Then, in a pitiful little voice, she said:

"Do you mean it?"

"*Mean it!*" and he clasped her to his bosom. "Oh, Edna, your words bid me hope. You care a little—just a little for me?"

"I never dreamed of such happiness as this," was her answer. "I wonder if I am really awake."

"Then you care for me? You have cared for me when you tormented me?"

"Oh, I loved you so much—it was you who tormented—at times I wished I was dead."

"My darling, now I have the right to call you so," and he took her face between his hands and kissed her lips; "and you will name an early wedding day," and again his arms are about her.

"Oh, I must think over that," she said, with a happy laugh. "Won't you let me go now, Mr. Gordon?"

"Mr. Gordon!"

The name, when he uttered it himself, seemed to have a strange effect upon him. He did not say "Call me Vere." His arms fell from about her. Great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. He clasped her in his arms again in his desperate way, and his voice was hoarse as he said:

"Yes, you had better go, now. It is very cold here."

He kissed her again, and she ran away.

"Great God, why did I meet her out here to-night? But I knew it would be so. I knew I could not always be strong, and she loves me."

He wiped the perspiration from his brow when he spoke; then he lighted another cigar and walked up and down the path.

"If I had only kept still! It has been a base deception. I had no right to speak to her—no right. Will she accept my love as an excuse? I'll get no deeper in the mire." He stopped in his walk as he said this. There was an air of sudden determination in the movement. "I'll leave this house to-night; I'll go back to New York. No, I can't do that to-night, for I have made a business appointment at the Continental to-morrow morning. Well, I can leave this house to-night. I can do that. I will not see her again until she knows all. I'll write to her making a clean breast of it. I shall leave it to her to call me back. I will make business my excuse to Mr. Leighton. I will go to-night," and with this determination he hurried to the house.

He learned that the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the drawing-room, and he sent there for Clifford.

"When are you going back to New York, Dick?"

"I think I *must* go to-morrow. I would like to stay——"

"But you *can't* stay," said Gordon, excitedly. "I have done what I should not have done. I have played the part of the scoundrel at last. I can't tell you to-night. Matters have reached a climax. Something *must* be done. What train will you take to-morrow?"

Clifford looked helpless with surprise. Gordon spoke in a tone from which there was no appealing.

"I suppose I can take an early train."

"Then maybe you can meet me at the Continental. I will be there until ten o'clock. I shall leave here within an hour."

Clifford saw that his friend was not in a humor to answer questions.

"I'll try to get down in time to go with you to New York," Dick said.

"Is Miss Forrest in the parlor?" asked Gordon, abruptly.

"No, I believe she has retired ill—that is, I think I heard some of the ladies say so."

"All right, I'll pack up and join you in the parlor. I suppose Mr. Leighton is there?"

"Yes."

"Very well, I'll come in to say good-bye."

Gordon moved rapidly when Clifford left him. He gave himself no time to think. In twenty minutes he was excusing his abrupt departure to Mr. Leighton, and ten minutes after was being driven to the Continental Hotel.

Edna was sitting in her room with a happy glow in her face. There was no stifling sensation now, no mad fever of the brain.

"And he loved me all the time!" she said to herself over and over again. "Oh, it is so like a dream, a happy, happy dream! I hope nothing will ever happen to awaken me."

What delightful moments they were, as she sat there dreaming on and on until a knock on the door startled her, and a maid came in to say:

"There is a woman here, Miss Forrest, who insists on seeing you, as she says her business is very important."

"A woman—this hour!"

The clock struck ten as Edna spoke. Her happy dream was broken, but only broken for the present, not ended. Oh, no; such a thought did not enter Edna's head. There was no presentiment of approaching evil. She had a curiosity to see this woman, to know her important business.

"She wants to see you alone, miss."

"Then show her in here, Kate," and Edna stepped toward the door, and as the servant opened it, just outside, Edna saw the most beautiful face her eyes ever beheld.

It was the face of a woman, young and fascinatingly beautiful, a woman who was not afraid to look at Edna.

Edna's interest increased, and her voice trembled a little as she said graciously:

"Won't you come in?"

The woman stepped in and closed the door, leaving the maid on the outside. She looked at the door again to make sure it was closed. There was an air of mystery about the woman that startled Edna.

"Don't be frightened," the woman said.

Edna was not frightened, but her pulses throbbed. Her voice was unnaturally calm when she said:

"May I ask who you are, and what is your business at this late hour?"

"I am your friend. The hour is late. I was here before this evening, but I could not see you. I had to go back to the city, and it took so long to get out here again. I am your friend, and I have come here to ask you to be mine."

The pleading of a passionate temperament was in the young woman's voice.

Now for the first time Edna thought the woman might be the bearer of evil news.

"How are you my friend, and what can I do for you?"

"I have come in time to save you from a life of misery—from throwing away your happiness."

This woman had something to say about Vere Gordon. This thought came to Edna, and she put out her hand like one warding off a blow, but the woman pitilessly continued:

"You are engaged to be married to Vere Gordon——"

"What is Vere Gordon to you?" Edna gasped.

"For Heaven's sake be strong—God knows I do not

want to hurt you, but you should know the truth. You will thank me for it by and by——”

“Have mercy—tell me quickly!”

“Vere Gordon is my husband—the father of my child.”

“It is false!”

“It is true. I can prove it.”

“Where are your proofs?”

“I will bring them to you. They were to be forwarded to me from England, but they have not yet arrived.”

“Will you see Vere Gordon here—here before my face, and charge him with this?”

“I will,” answered the woman, determinedly.

Edna summoned all her strength. She rang the bell. Neither spoke until the maid appeared.

“Is Mr. Gordon in the drawing-room?” said Edna, opening the door and speaking to the maid in a low tone.

“Mr. Gordon left very suddenly for New York, miss.”

“Mr. Gordon gone!” Edna grasped the door for support.

“Yes, miss, he is on his way to the depot now. John is driving him down.”

Gone, and without seeing her! Oh, God! this woman’s story, it must be true! Vere saw her and escaped.

These were Edna’s thoughts as she said to the maid:

“That will do.”

She closed the door and would have fallen, but the woman who brought her this misery caught her.

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake, miss, be strong!”

“I—I am strong,” gasped Edna. “You spoke of proofs. Will you bring them to me?”

“Yes; I may get them to-morrow.”

“That will do—that will do. You may go now.”

“Oh, indeed, miss, I am sorry——”

“Never mind—go—please go while I am strong. None of these people must know your errand here.”

“They shall not know.”

“Then go,” and Edna opened the door, “and come to-morrow if you get your proofs. Go.”

The woman passed out. Edna watched her down the stairs and heard the hall door close after her. Then Edna crossed the hall and walked almost to the end of it.

She opened a door; the gas was turned low, but the room was deserted.

It was Vere's room, and Edna looked about it. She opened the wardrobe. His clothes—everything belonging to him was gone.

She left the room; she tried to walk quickly. She made a desperate effort to reach her own room, but her footsteps failed; the hall danced round her.

Ten minutes later the household was thrown into a state of alarm.

A servant had found Miss Forrest lying prone in the hall. Then the ladies were kind enough to remember that Edna had said she was not well.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE AFFAIR.

NEXT morning a gentleman steps out of the Continental and is making his way toward the carriage waiting to take him to the depot, but near as it is he receives a shock before he reaches it. A woman's little hand gives him the shock, and a woman's handsome, derisive face confronts him.

"My God!" and he staggers back, white and trembling.

"Don't make a scene, I beg of you," the young woman says in a suppressed voice, but there is a dangerous flash in her eyes. "Vere Gordon, aren't you glad to see your wife and child?"

She is holding a lovely little girl of some three years by the hand, and she draws it toward Gordon as she speaks.

"Wait—wait!" the man gasps, "give me time to realize it is you!"

"Indeed, we meet in the nick of time. I was going to Miss Edna Forrest with proofs of our marriage. You see, I know everything. I have not been idle, though it has taken me a long, weary time to track you."

"You were going to Miss Forrest? Good God, that would have been a terrible mistake! Hetty, I thought you had left me forever."

"And how you rejoiced in the thought!" she said derisively.

"I was glad to be free." He had partly recovered himself, and spoke those words in a deep, low voice. "Come, we cannot talk here. The carriage is waiting to take me to the depot. If you will drive with me we can talk."

"Very well," she says. "Come, Baby."

"I will put her in," Gordon says. "Poor little Bea, won't you kiss me?"

"Kiss your papa, dear," says Bea's mamma, loudly.

"You must have stolen the child from my sister," he says when they are seated in the carriage.

"Since you think your sister would not give her to me, I must have stolen her. Did they not acquaint you with the fact? You should have heard it by this time. I've no doubt you will find plenty of European mail when you return to New York. You see I am posted as to your movements."

He looks earnestly at the handsome, derisive face, as he says:

"Hetty, why have you stolen the child? Why have you followed me? You know we never could live happily together, and since we discovered our marriage was illegal——"

"Hush!" You ruined my life; you married me by fraud——"

"Not intentionally, Hetty. You know that I was not aware the marriage was illegal any more than you until after Beatrix was born."

"Bah!" she says, contemptuously. "You would not have cast me off so easily when you discovered it, if it were not all planned beforehand."

"Oh, Hetty, Hetty, you know that you were only too willing to leave me!"

"That was because I did not know any better. I thought I was doing the right thing to leave you when I was not married to you. I was young and foolish and I did not know what the world thought about such things; but you did, and you let me go," she said, fiercely.

Gordon leaned back in the carriage. His lips tightened as if he did not wish to speak. He had suffered all that man could suffer at this woman's hands, he thought, and here she was to torture him again. Here she was sitting before him with brazen, derisive face, when he thought

himself rid of her forever. When he thought of such suffering as he had endured, it was enough to drive him mad, and he said in desperation:

"Why have you come back to torture me?"

"Because the world has not treated me well, and I wanted my baby. I insist on you making our marriage good. You must marry me here——"

Gordon's face turned a deathly pallor.

"What if I refuse?"

The words seemed to snap from his bloodless lips.

"What if you refuse!" she cried, with blazing eyes.

"I will denounce you to the woman you intended to marry, and that you will think directly is the least I will do, for it is in my power to ruin your father—ruin him pecuniarily and socially, and that ruin for him in England means ruin for you all, no matter in what part of the globe you may be."

He knew this girl well enough to know she made no idle threat; yet he said, sneeringly:

"Since when did you come by such wonderful power?"

"Since the Gage case; perhaps you have not heard of it," she says, imitating his tone.

He does not speak for some time. His face has changed, and not for the better, with the intensity of his emotions.

"I am going to New York," he began.

"Not until we are married," she interrupted, quietly.

He looked at her, and it was a dangerous look.

"For our child's sake," she said, softly.

He looked softened as he turned his eyes on the little child.

"Come with me to New York; I am not acquainted here."

"I shall go nowhere with you until we are married."

"But I told you I am not acquainted here."

"Isn't there a mayor? Can't he marry us?"

Gordon was silent for some moments. His face betrayed that dark passions were gaining supremacy.

He put his head out of the window and spoke to the driver, and presently the horses' heads were turned in another direction.

"I'll do it—we shall be married by the mayor," he says, in a suppressed voice, and he turned his gaze to the window.

The fair face of the man was a study, and the dark eyes of the woman were fixed upon it. There were pain and bitterness and emotion in the face. She understood every emotion, all the better, perhaps, as she understood the man. She was glad she saw the determination, for it told her that this man, in spite of his pain, in spite of his bitterness, had that moral strength that leads to right action.

She hoped the office of the city's magistrate was not far distant. Even such determination as Vere's might give out, and the silence became unbearable.

"I think you might speak to me—and you might take the baby in your arms and be a bit fatherly."

"Hush, hush!"

He waved his hand toward her, and he spoke as if he could bear no more. She smiled as he again looked out of the window—she smiled at what she considered his weakness. As a matter of course, this beautiful, unprincipled creature thought the very strength of this man's character was weakness.

The carriage stopped at last, and her heart stood still as he hesitated a moment, but the next he was on the pavement, saying to the driver:

"Wait here."

She stepped out quickly, saying in a voice that trembled in spite of her:

"Take Bea!"

He did not seem to hear her, yet he took the little three-year-old, who put up her arms to him. He turned away with her, and did not pause until he reached the mayor's office. He didn't speak nor look at Hetty, but she followed his footsteps closely.

"This is strange—strange getting married for the second time; but you will have it done right this time—for the child's sake, you know," she says pleadingly.

"Remain here," was all he said, and he went away with the child in his arms as if he had forgotten that he was holding her.

Hetty kept her eyes on him. She saw him speak to one man, then to another, and some fifteen minutes later he came to her and said:

"Come."

His face was livid as he took his place by her side before the mayor.

"Let Bea down," Hetty whispered.

Vere started. He looked at the child, and let her slip from him. The look of determination vanished. He drew away from Hetty. The situation dawned upon him. He was mad to do this thing, mad. What would the world say? The world! What cared he for the world! What would *she* say? In this agonizing moment he saw only *her* face, he thought only of *her* verdict. It was the face and the verdict of the woman he loved.

"For our child's sake!" Hetty whispered, clinging to him.

"Yes, for the child's sake," he murmured, and in the presence of the child they were bound by the civil contract that made them man and wife.

CHAPTER V.

WILL SHE?

ALL day long Edna waited for the proof of Vere Gordon's marriage. She had spent a sleepless night after recovering from her fainting spell, and no need to say the day was wretched.

Her illness and fainting last evening, were an excuse for her keeping her room to-day. Would that beautiful demon come to her again? for in spite of her beauty and passionate pleadings, and even of her wrong, Edna could only think of her as a demon who had ruined her happiness. Could it be true that Vere Gordon was a married man? His running away last night went a great way to confirm this fact, yet Edna was not without a faint hope, that hope that is in every breast; that what they believe in is true until it is proved utterly false.

The day passed slowly, torturously, and no word from Vere, and no word from the woman who claimed to be his wife. Knowing that he was found out, would he send no word to ask her forgiveness. He cared something for her, she reasoned, or he would not have expressed himself as he did. She could not believe his actions were prompted by the basest of feelings, yet what else could she think. But was he vile enough to let her think so?—to offer no explanation? She grasped at the

thought of the possibility of some horrible mistake as daylight faded away and the woman came not. She nursed this thought and it strengthened her somewhat to attend to her duties, which were to see to the comforts of and to entertain Mr. Leighton's guests.

She dressed for dinner, with the horrible dread of meeting all these people again. Cora Taunton's derisive face was before her. She was filled with horror at the thought of the penetrating glance of that lady. But join them she must, and to add to her wretchedness, Mr. Tremaine stood at the foot of the stairs as if waiting there for her; in fact, he informed her, in his florid style, he was there with the hope of meeting her.

"Ah, the very lady I wished to see. I trust Miss Forrest is better?"

"Much better, thank you," Edna said, trying her utmost to be agreeable.

"Ah, I am glad to hear that. I have something to say to you, Miss Forrest. Where can I have a few uninterrupted moments with you. Miss Taunton is in the parlor now, and they will all be there in a few minutes."

Edna could scarcely conceal her annoyance. Every day she found it harder to rid herself of this gentleman's attentions. There was nothing for her now but to give him the few moments he asked; it was an effectual way, perhaps, of getting rid of him for the evening; and she led the way to the library, saying, as she pushed open the door:

"I don't think we will be disturbed here."

"Not unless Miss Taunton knows we are here; then she would be bound to drop in for a book, of course."

He laughed, but there was indignation in the laugh. Edna forced herself to smile.

"When I think," he said, his laugh ceasing and his indignation increasing, "of the insult she offered you last night, it makes my blood boil; it does indeed. A lovely, accomplished girl like you should not be in a position to suffer such insults."

"I am not at all ashamed of my position, Mr. Tremaine; the mistake was on Miss Taunton's side," said Edna, with a dignity that charmed Marcus Tremaine,

and she added quietly: "You said you had something to say to me, Mr. Tremaine."

If Edna thought this would cut Mr. Tremaine short she was mistaken, for he went straight on with the subject she wished ended.

"This is just the thing I wished to say to you," he said, bluntly. "You know what I think of you, and I can't forgive Miss Taunton for what she said, and you have no right to court such insults. This is no position for you! You are fitted for——"

"Mr. Tremaine, I beg you will excuse me. I thank you for your sympathy, and let us dismiss the subject with that. Besides, I must remind you dinner will be served in a few minutes."

She rose as she spoke, but the New York speculator was not going to let her escape so easily. Some months ago he had made up his mind Edna Forrest was the girl he wanted for a wife. He argued that as he was a man of great wealth he was entitled to anything his money could bring him. He would not like to frankly acknowledge, even to himself, that he was *buying* a wife, but he was not sentimental—he had no room, no time for sentiment. All his speculations were given to material things. He had no time for the analysis of love. No doubt if he was questioned as to his feelings toward Miss Forrest he would say he loved her, and his answer would be truthful after the manner of his thought. He knew he liked her better than any young lady he knew. He had been looking about for a wife too, and he selected her for many reasons. He liked her better than any other. She was very young, she was a beauty, and (Marcus Tremaine was shrewd) she would develop into a very brilliant woman, and that was most essential for a man with wealth. He wanted a woman who could display it for him to the best advantage, a woman who would attract—wealth being hers—the most brilliant and notable people in town. That was the sort of establishment he wanted to have, and none but a brilliant woman could make it for him. Summing up Mr. Tremaine's calculations on this point, he thought he ought to get the best in the land for his money.

"Oh, no," he said, placing himself between her and the door. "You are not going until you hear what I

have to say. I am going back to New York to-morrow, and I would like to take your final answer with me."

"You have my final answer, Mr. Tremaine," said Edna, coloring.

"Oh, no, I haven't," he said good-naturedly; "true, you have put me off, but that is the way of most women. I have never taken your answer as final; why should I?"

Why should he! Edna was amazed. How could she answer his question. If she was not so very wretched, she would be amused; as it was, she could not help smiling, as she said:

"You should take it for final, I suppose, because I meant what I said; I really do not know any other reason."

"Oh, nonsense; I have found out that women never know what they are talking about—I beg pardon! I intended to say that your sex never mean what you say. Now, now, no more protests," he said, with a wave of his hand.

Edna was silent in the moment of silence he allowed. Whether it was the man's cool assurance or the force of his character, she could not think at that moment, but she was unable to offer further protest, and after the slight pause, he said:

"It hurts me to see you in this position. You have no right to remain where these high-stepping women trod you under foot. Let me protect you from all this. There is room for you here," and Mr. Tremaine touched his breast in the direction of his heart. His breast was certainly large, but as to the dimensions of his heart—well, Edna will find that out soon enough. "Little girl, no one will ever be able to hurt you after you are my wife," and he stroked her hair as he spoke.

True, Marcus Tremaine's manner and speech were the reverse of the refined, only there was a heartiness about them for the time—a genuine kindness that touched Edna. He had not the qualities that made her fall desperately in love with Vere Gordon; but was not this wish to protect her from all harm the essence of manliness; and if it were true what she had heard of Vere Gordon, did he not do her the greatest harm that any one could do her in this life?

The thought flashed upon Edna, and she said, with some emotion:

"Believe me, Mr. Tremaine, I appreciate your kind intention, but I cannot——"

"Oh, don't say that, for you *will*, and I'll come here for your answer before I go away at noon to-morrow."

He dropped his hand from her hair, caressingly, to her shoulder, lingered in silence for a moment, then bowed and left her.

She sank in a chair; an influence she could not resist came over her, and a few minutes later the question that startled her was: Would she ever consent to be Marcus Tremaine's wife? She asked herself the question, then caught herself at it and was startled.

"What an absurd question!" she said, rising, "what an absurd question. I *will*, he said, and I am foolish enough to say will I?"

A servant came to say dinner was awaiting Miss Forrest, and he presented a letter that had just been left by the postman;

Edna glanced at the envelope. It was Vere Gordon's handwriting on an envelope of the Continental Hotel.

The room went round as she looked at it.

The servant's inquiry as to whether she was ill brought her to her senses.

"No, it is nothing," she gasped. "You may announce dinner."

She thrust the letter in her pocket. She must not read it until dinner is over. She hurried to the parlor, and as she entered her eyes met Mr. Tremaine's and his eyes said:

"You *will*!"

CHAPTER VI.

A LETTER AND TELEGRAM.

"Too bad Gordon left last night. This evening's news would give us a grand joke on him," said young Will Rowley, another of Mr. Leighton's guests, as he finished his soup.

"Oh, did you hear Mr. Gordon was called away suddenly last night?" said Mr. Leighton to Edna.

As he had not seen Edna all day he did not know whether she had heard of the departure.

"And Mr. Clifford left us this morning," continued Mr. Leighton.

"I believe one of the servants told me," Edna said.

"What's the joke, Mr. Rowley?" asked Tremaine.

"Why, there was a very strange marriage to-day by the mayor; everybody is talking about it."

"What has that to do with Gordon?" asked Tremaine.

"You don't mean to say Mr. Gordon was married by the mayor?" said Cora Taunton.

"Whoever the man was he gave his name as Vere Gordon. The bride was very beautiful."

"Well, that would have been a good one on Gordon. Too bad he left for New York last night," said Tremaine, laughing.

"Mr. Gordon did not leave last night, for Mr. Clifford told me he was to meet him at the Continental, and they were going to New York together," said Cora, quickly.

Edna's spoon almost dropped in her plate. She could not control her nerves; her hand trembled visibly. Cora took pains to let Edna know she noticed her.

"Your news makes Miss Forrest nervous," she said.

"Why should it?" said Mr. Leighton, coming to Edna's rescue as he saw what a deathly color she was. "She is not foolish enough to think it was Vere Gordon, her friend."

"No, indeed, sir," Edna tried to say in a steady voice. And she thought, "I would be foolish indeed to think this of him. The worst I can think is he was married to that woman, and if he was married to her, how could he be married this morning?" She had not time to think further, for attention was attracted by Rowley saying:

"I think there is something strange about it; Vere Gordon is not a common name, you know."

"Oh, come; it would be enough to joke Gordon about this if he were here; but you can't think seriously of it. Gordon isn't the fellow to make such a fool of himself as the gentleman who was married by the mayor," said Tremaine.

"Oh, there is no telling what a man in love will do," laughed Miss Taunton. "I wonder what Mr. Gordon will say when he hears his name has had such a circulation here?"

The conversation, fortunately, took a merry turn at

this part, and Edna was spared further comment on Vere Gordon until they were leaving the dining-room, when Cora Taunton said:

"You look wretched to-night, Miss Forrest. I hope you are not letting the news of that strange marriage affect you. I really don't believe it *was* Mr. Gordon," concluded Cora, in a tone of mock consolation.

"Neither do I," said Edna quietly, though her blood tingled at this fresh insult.

"Now, if Miss Forrest were missing, we would say she was the beautiful bride of this morning," said Cora with more derision.

"But Miss Forrest is here, and she wishes she could be charitable enough to believe Miss Taunton thought her missing, when Miss Taunton indulged in the aimless sarcasm," said Edna, goaded to madness, and she turned quickly and left the room, not daring to trust herself to speak further.

"What have I said?" asked Cora, innocently; then with a shrug, and loud enough for her voice to reach Edna: "but considering the source, that is just what one might expect. You cannot expect such people to control their tempers.

The words followed Edna like so many darts of fire.

"I won't remain in this position, I *won't*! I will starve first. Mr. Tremaine spoke the truth. I have no right to remain where I am trodden upon!"

She was in her room now and the hot tears were flowing down her cheeks.

"To think she would even seize upon this marriage to insult me. How strange that his name should be used. Ah, the letter!"

She thrust her hand into her pocket and the next moment she was reading:

"MY OWN DARLING,—I will call you so, if I never see you again, for you will always be that to me. Without doubt you will be surprised at my sudden departure this evening, but I could not see you again. I had no right to see you at all this evening—that is to see you and talk to you as I did, but the temptation was so great, and I had concealed my feelings so long, that in a moment of weakness I fell from my good resolutions, and you were in my arms and I was pouring out my great love for you.

But I had no right to speak until I had first made a confession, until I had first told you I had been guilty of a gross deception. I wanted to let you read the dark page of my life, I wanted you to judge of my sin—if sin I should call it. I can prove to you that I meant no wrong though *I have won your love under false pretenses*. That is my crime, and yet if *you* are true I know you will forgive me. I should not have left the house without making a revelation to you, but I am under promise not to speak. I will soon be relieved from my burden—a burden I was cursed in taking upon myself the first day, but once relieved, I will come to you and tell you all—that is if you send but the word—if you will write to New York and say, Vere, I love you, come to me. In what anguish of spirit I shall wait for these words will never be known to any one but the man who loves you.

“VERE GORDON.”

The letter was slow reading; it was hastily, disconnectedly written, and Edna, after going over every sentence again and again, was in a state of confusion. What sense could she take from his wild words? Her heart beat alternately with hope and fear. He had committed a fraud, he was carrying a sin, he had taken upon himself a burden that was his curse. What fraud had he committed? What was his sin—his burden? It is the woman, was Edna’s mental answer to her thoughts. If she is not his wife, he has wronged her, or he is innocent and she has some claim upon him that he has not been able to set aside.

“Oh, God,” she cried in anguish, “what hope is there for me? It grows darker and darker. What shall I say to him? He loves me—yes, he loves me now—and what can I say to him? What shall I write? Oh, if I could only see that woman now, if I could see or hear from her——”

There is a knock on the door. It is a telegram for Edna. It is from New York. She reads it. The room reels, a mist gathers over her eyes. Her wish has been answered. She has heard from the woman. She sinks in the chair she has caught.

“Oh, God, let me die!” she cried.

She rubs her eyes, and again she reads that terrible telegram, that death-knell to every hope.

"I promised you proofs of my marriage, but I forgot to tell you there were some legal technicalities. They, however, are removed now, and you will find in the records of the mayor's office all the legal proof you may require of my marriage, which was solemnized there this morning. I caught him in the nick of time at the Continental, and he made right what was wrong, for which you should be thankful as well as I."

"MRS. VERE GORDON."

Now she understood his letter. Everything was as plain as day. The woman had a claim upon him; that was why he said he had no right to speak to her (Edna). He thought last night, by the tone of his letter, that he could rid himself of the woman who claimed him, perhaps by every right recognized by Heaven, but to-day he found he could not, and—and, he was compelled to satisfy her claim. Now there was no excusing his conduct. The woman's claim, he acknowledged by his conduct to-day, was just.

"But he loves *me*!"

The cry was wrung from the suffering heart and it escaped her lips before she knew it. But the moment the feeling was breathed out she tried to crush it.

"Thank God that I received this telegram in time. I shall answer his letter now; answer it as he deserves. He shall never know what he is making me suffer."

And with that rash impulse she sat down and answered his letter. It was a brief answer to all that wild anguish he had sent her.

"Vere Gordon, you have played the part of a villain. I never want to look on your face again."

"EDNA FORREST."

That was all. She directed and stamped the envelope, and stood for a moment with it in her hand.

"I'll post it myself," she said, as if that was the conclusion she had reached. "Even one of the servants shall not know I have written to him."

CHAPTER VII.

"THE GIRL IS MAD."

A FEW moments later Edna is stealing down-stairs. She reached the lower hall unseen, but passing through

that she heard Cora Taunton's laugh. It reminded her of Cora's insults. She paused when she was out on the steps in the cold night air.

"I shall never come back to this house again," she said, "I have been insulted on every hand. Who has respect for the hired dependent? Did not he, who pretended to be my champion, offer the grossest insult of all? I must leave this house to-night; but where can I go? I have not a friend in the world. Oh, Heaven! death is preferable to this misery! What is to become of me?"

For one moment the wretched girl thought of the river—for one moment only; the next the hall door opened, a flood of light streamed out, and with it, Marcus Tremaine. What was to become of her? Here was her answer. She looked up at him with that thought in her head. A hand of ice clutched her heart.

Here was one who had not insulted her, here was one who offered her the highest gift that man had to bestow on woman, but last night had she not boasted to the man she loved:

"Marcus Tremaine says I will come to my senses some day, but if that day ever comes, it will be the day I discover I love him."

Twenty-four hours have scarcely passed since then, and what is she considering? Has she come to her senses, or has she lost them? Time, the avenger, shall answer that question.

Has she discovered she loves him? Love! what will she have to do with love forever again? What is love since he who vowed he loved her only wished her harm? Marcus Tremaine could give her all that women valued so highly. As his wife, she would never again have to suffer insult; she would occupy a position at which none could sneer—a position equal to Vere Gordon's when she met him again.

This thought was a grand incentive. They would meet again, and she would not be a paid dependent. This thought was a strange contradiction to the letter in her hand in which she wished never to see his face again.

Alas! it was a woman's logic.

"What are you doing here?" said Tremaine, closing

the door. "I beg your pardon. I mean it's so strange to see you standing out here in the cold; but the atmosphere is less chilling, perhaps, than some of the company inside."

"I had a letter to post, and I thought I would do it myself," she said.

"It isn't well for you to go alone. I will accompany you," he said, moving down the steps, and buttoning up his coat as if the matter were settled.

She did not speak nor move. He reached the foot of the steps and looked up at her. He was about to speak, but she said quickly:

"Mr. Tremaine, you gave me until to-morrow to consider your proposal."

"Yes; but I will take it now, if you are willing. I know you are going to say yes."

Was this the daring with which this man conquered always, or had he the power to divine the girl's thoughts?

She looked up to the starry sky. He saw her face was a deathly white.

"Don't be frightened," he said, stepping up to her. "You will have to accept me some time. You might as well take courage and do it now."

She does not notice his coolness now, but long after, when she thought of this dreadful night, it came back to her.

"If I said yes, Mr. Leighton would never consent to it," she said.

"Well, who wants his consent? He is nothing to you."

"He has been very kind to me."

"Nonsense!" he interrupted; "if he won't give his consent, we can be married without it."

"Then I should have to leave this house clandestinely," she said, as if the words came from her lips unconsciously.

"And you can do that this very night, if you please. Come, say but the word, and we can be married within an hour, and no one will dare question the act. A man of my wealth and position can do as he pleases."

And he stated his belief exactly, as Edna will one day find out to her sorrow.

"Oh, God, save me, or I'm lost!" she thought, with a moan.

"What is the matter?" and he took her hand. "Why do you hesitate? I am sure you will never regret it."

Still she hesitated; but she let him hold her hand. What conclusion will she come to?

We will not wait here for her to arrive at it. At midnight we hear the conclusion she came to; hear it as Mr. Leighton reads it from a letter he found on his dressing-case as he was about to retire.

"Mr. Leighton, I can never tell you or any one living why I have taken this step. I cannot blame you if you think me ungrateful, base—everything that is bad. All I want you to believe is that I spoke the truth yesterday when I said I would never marry Marcus Tremaine. It was the truth then; I meant it from my heart, though when you are reading these lines I shall have left your house to become his wife.
EDNA FORREST."

Mr. Leighton read it again and again before he could fairly comprehend it,

"Heavens and earth—the girl is mad!" he cried. "The girl is mad! What shall I do?"

He jumped from his chair, and put on his hat and coat.

"No one in the house must know it; if she be gone, I must try to bring her back before it is too late. The girl has gone mad. She does not know what she is about. It is my duty to stop this marriage if I can."

He ordered the carriage. He tried faithfully to overtake the runaways, but they had gained too much time. He was too late. The police were active, but they could not find a trace of the birds that had flown, and all Mr. Leighton accomplished was the very thing he did not wish. He spread the news of the elopement, and in the morning the city rung with the tidings of the runaway match. Late as it happened, there were "full accounts" in the morning papers of the elopement of Miss Edna Forrest and the New York millionaire, Marcus Tremaine.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW GORDON TOOK THE NEWS.

ABOUT eleven o'clock next morning, while friends and strangers are discussing that unexpected and irretrievable step taken by Edna, we invite our reader to a handsome bachelor apartment in New York. The solitary occupant is a young man, who is seemingly engaged in studying images in the grate.

He has been sitting there still and silent a long time. He stretches his feet, now clasps his hands behind his head and looks from the grate up to the *bric-a-brac* over the mantel and says to himself:

"Well, I wonder how it is going to end?"

He must have been studying *it* out in the coals.

"I wish I could throw off this—what shall I call it?—gloom, misgiving, presentiment of something dark and terrible. I am allowing my fears to take exaggerated forms. She will surely bid me come to her. She will give me a hearing, at least, and then—well, then, if she love me, all will be well. I thought she might telegraph me to come; yes, having told her how I was suffering, she might have done that. Will this morning's mail bring me a letter? Will I be in Philadelphia this evening?"

He did not dream of asking himself if he would be on his way to Europe this evening. Yet the evening will show how little man can forecast even twelve hours of the future. As he asked himself the last question, there was a knock on the door, and after his invitation to enter, he said:

"Hello, Dick! you are a pretty fellow! I thought you would meet me at the Continental yesterday morning?" and he pulled a chair to the fire for his visitor.

"Well, my intentions were good."

"Could not tear yourself away from the irresistible Cora, I suppose?"

"Don't mention *her*!" said the other, sinking in a chair.

"What's the matter? Have you proposed, and been jilted?"

"Oh, no, no! Never mention that again. When I arrived at the hotel yesterday, you were gone, and—oh, it was just as well. I missed you, perhaps."

"For Heaven's sake, Dick, what has happened? Now, I look at you, you are as white as a ghost."

"Oh, nothing much," he said, with a bitter laugh; "but I leave for Europe this afternoon—steamer sails at two."

"You are going to Europe!"

"Well, I'm going to England by steamer, but I really can't say now where my destination will be, and as I am a living man, I don't care. If it were not for the lives of others, I wish the steamer would go to the bottom of the sea."

"If you are not jilted, for Heaven's sake what has happened? Excuse me," he said rising and going to the door in answer to a knock.

"Your mail, sir," said a servant, and before Vere closed the door his eye ran over every envelope.

His heart bounded as he saw on one the Philadelphia post-mark. It was directed in an uncertain hand. He tore it open, and did not hear Clifford saying:

"Of course, I mean to arrange everything satisfactory for you, though it detains me a month—What's the matter? Bad news?"

These questions were brought out by an involuntary groan escaping Vere's lips, as he stood looking at the open letter, rather than at the couple of lines written on the sheet before him.

"Vere Gordon, I never want to look on your face again."

That was all, yet it seemed to take him a long time to comprehend it. When he did, he crushed the letter in his hand and walked over to the fire.

"*You* haven't been jilted?" said Dick, with a dreamy smile; then, before Vere had time to reply, he said suddenly: "By Jove, that reminds me of a telegram I have to show you. I received it not half an hour ago from Miss Taunton," and he took the yellow paper from his pocket and placed it in Vere's hand. It read:

"I thought the latest news would be interesting to you; Miss Forrest eloped with Marcus Tremaine."

"That is a lie!" cried Vere, springing to his feet.

"It is the truth, for I have had further proof. As I was coming here I met John Fosdycke, Tremaine's bosom

friend, and he has had a telegram from Tremaine—he showed it to me—telling him the news I have brought you.”

There is a silence of some moments. Vere Gordon stands, his elbow on the mantel, looking down into the grate. Without raising his head, he says:

“I will go with you this afternoon if I can secure a passage. I don’t mind telling you, I have been jilted for Marcus Tremaine.”

Clifford was silent some time before he said:

“I don’t know what to say to you, Vere, but you must know how I feel for you. Perhaps you had better not act too hastily about leaving the country. I don’t think you heard me say that I meant to arrange everything for you before I went. From this moment let our compact cease.”

“Too late!” said Vere, with a nervous snap of his fingers.

His face and the gesture had more of pain than a volume could describe.

“Too late!” says Clifford, springing to his feet. “Great heavens, you don’t mean to say our compact has hurt you?”

There was a silence again; then Vere threw back his head with a bitter laugh.

“No, no, our compact could have had nothing to do with making her run off with Tremaine. If that is what her love is made of, it is just as well, perhaps. Bah, let us not talk about it. I don’t want to hear her name again. Let us go back as we came—there is no need of an explanation now. If we meet our American friends again over the water we can tell them we played a joke upon them, and we will let it go at that. I’ll get my luggage ready now, if you will excuse me, Dick.”

“But I want to tell you something that has happened to me, Vere.”

“If you wish to do me a kindness you will go and secure me a state-room or a berth or anything you can get, and you can tell me all about what has happened when we get on board.”

Dick is gone, and Vere alone once more smooths out the crumpled letter in his hand. He reads it again; then says:

"And it is not forty-eight hours since she vowed her love for me and—and, what was it she said? If ever I marry Marcus Tremaine, it will be when I learn that I love him. Has she found out that she loves him? Bah, as if a woman like her knows anything about that sacred feeling. There."

He drops the letter in the grate, watches it blaze up, then turn black.

"Is that the end of it?" He shakes his head. "Would to God I could say it was the end of it for me. What have I done that this girl shall ruin my life. Oh, Edna, Edna!"

Her name burst forth with the grief he could not control. He rose and walked the floor forgetful of what he had to do.

"Well," he said when he was quiet, "I suppose this is what these women with their little souls call a triumph. I wonder if we will ever meet again?"

Leave it to Father Time, he answers all things.

CHAPTER IX.

BEGINNING TO MAKE IT PLEASANT FOR HER.

THERE is a brilliant gathering at a wealthy, fashionable house on Fifth Avenue. It is in honor of Miss Cora Taunton's return from Europe and her engagement to Count Blandenburgh. Mrs. Taunton's motherly bosom swells with pride to-night, though up to three months ago it had been filled with doubts and fears for Cora, who had been five seasons out, but to-night Mrs. Taunton thinks her daughter has made up for the delay by making an engagement that will torture so many American belles with envy.

Cora looks resplendent in white silk, and gauze, and diamonds. Her eyes are as bright, her skin as satiny, and her tongue as sharp as when we first met her two years ago.

"Mr. Tremaine is here, but I do not see his wife," she is saying to an old friend who has been telling her all the news. "I met him abroad a few months ago, in Florence; his wife was not with him then; he told me he had just run over on business. If it were the business that engaged him in Florence, that brought him over, I

was not surprised that he left his wife at home. He was engaged in a desperate flirtation. I say desperate, because Tremaine was so earnest with Lady Landimer, a gay, fascinating countess, about whom there is a good joke. All Europe, I believe, says she is forever following her husband, but never overtaking him. Acquaintance of husband and wife said that Lord Landimere had waited two weeks over the time his wife appointed to meet him in Florence. He rose one morning, and if the truth were known, left in disgust, and that very day her ladyship arrived, and when she was told of her husband's departure, she laughed heartily, and said most innocently: 'I knew he would be gone, it is so like him, you know,' which perhaps goes to prove that many a serious word is said in a jest," and Cora laughed as she said: "Mr. Tremaine arrived the day after the countess, and as I told you a desperate flirtation followed, and all Florence talked about it."

"That would not be pleasant news for Mrs. Tremaine. I wonder how she would act if she received a shock? I can't imagine, she is so white, and quiet, and statue-like. When she came here first she acted like one in a maze—like a dreamer who had no aim."

"I've no doubt she was in a maze," laughed Cora. "You know she was only a servant when Mr. Tremaine married her."

"Oh, not a servant," said Miss Bellport, the young lady talking to Cora. "She was the companion and friend of Miss Leighton, and, indeed, Mrs. Tremaine is a beautiful girl."

"Of course Tremaine married her for her beauty. I guess he has had enough of it, though. You say she goes out very little?"

"I don't think she has been out this season—at least I haven't met her, and I heard she did not go out at all. I met her once last season, and I believe she receives very little now, though the first winter she came here she received a great deal; her entertainments were on a magnificent scale, you know. Ah, there is Mr. Tremaine! I hope he was not near us. I don't think we were speaking in a very guarded tone," said Miss Bellford, dropping her voice to a whisper as her eyes fell on Marcus Tremaine.

They had not been speaking in a very guarded tone, and Mr. Tremaine being very near, heard every word that Cora said about his home and foreign relations. He moved away when Cora said:

“Of course he married her for her beauty.”

He could scarcely control his indignation, his anger, at this point. Naturally, my reader will think Mr. Tremaine's indignation and anger are against Cora Taunton, but if my reader has arrived at this conclusion, it is because he is not yet thoroughly acquainted with Marcus Tremaine. His indignation is against the girl who had the misfortune to run away with him one night, two years ago, because she did not know what else to do, or better still, because she did not know what she was doing. His anger is against himself.

“Yes,” he says, in his thoughts echoing the latter part of Cora's sentence, “for her beauty; what a fool I was! For her beauty and her elegance and her culture.”

Then he mentally dashes her elegance and her culture, and he stands where he thinks he will not be observed and looks back at Cora and comments upon her.

“I don't know but she is about right; she always was. What *could* I expect. I should have married a girl like Cora; she was brilliant enough for a count and I could have caught her with my money if I wasn't such a fool. She wouldn't have had any scruples about how I made my money, nor lecture me on the extravagant use of it. Oh, no, a New York girl has no such nonsense. I thought I was shrewd, but I wasn't shrewd for a cent when I married a quiet little Quakeress. She is so quiet and white—nice things for people to say about her, I suppose the next thing will be that she has some secret trouble. By Jove, she *does* act like that!” he said, as if something had suddenly dawned upon him. “She *does* act strangely!”

He turns that sentence over in his mind again and again. He becomes restless, and presently leaves the house for home. On arriving there he notices what, at another time, might escape his attention; the house, an imposing structure finely located, is almost dark, though it is scarcely half-past ten. A faint light in the hall, and a fainter one in the parlor, are all that relieve it from total darkness.

He walks up-stairs in a sort of quiet fury. He enters his wife's sitting-room, where he expects to find her. She is not there, rather he does not see her, for this room is in darkness also save where the light falls through an open door from a room adjoining. He steps to the threshold of this door, and pauses suddenly.

He sees his wife sitting before the dressing-table as if she had been preparing to retire, for her hair is hanging in a shining mass around her, while her elbows rest on the table, and her face is buried in her hands.

"Edna!"

His voice is sharp. She raises her head quickly, and the face he sees in the glass looks bewildered, and is as white as if it were the face of a statue. She turns partly toward him as she says:

"Aren't you home early?"

"Nice home it is to come to! It's as dark and cold-looking as a prison."

"A prison!"

She rubs her hands together as the words fall from her lips. The hopelessness of the gesture spoke volumes, but Marcus Tremaine did not understand it. A prison, he said, and that is what she had thought for two years. She was surrounded with all that money could buy, but the bars being of gold made it no less a prison.

"Yes, a prison," he says.

She tries to rouse herself, to shake off some feeling that has fallen upon her.

"If I thought you would be at home so early," she began, but he interrupts her with increasing anger:

"You would turn on the lights, I suppose; but are you never at home to any one? Is the house in darkness every night that I am not here?"

She does not answer.

"Do you not go out any more?"

Her hand sweeps across her forehead ostensibly for the purpose of pushing back her hair; but perhaps it is to clear away something else that is blinding her senses.

"You do not answer," he says.

She raises her eyes slowly to his face, and they rest steadily there as she says:

"I was wondering whether you thought I ought to go out to-night; out where you went, I mean."

"Of course I did. I expect you to go everywhere you are asked unless you have a better reason for staying at home than making a prisoner or a nun of yourself."

"Surely you know I had a better reason than either you mentioned for staying at home to-night."

Her look was eager as she said this.

"I know of no good reason you could have."

The eager look disappears and the hopelessness comes back. She has learned long ago that she has nothing to expect from this man. His coarseness, his lack of feeling is killing her.

"Two years is a long time—a long time," she says wearily, "still it is not long enough to make me forget that, to say the least, I have no good reason to join a gathering to-night in honor of Miss Cora Taunton. I have not forgotten her insults, if you have."

If the last three little words have any edge for him he does not show it. Indeed, it is not likely they hurt him in the sense of making him feel that he had disrespected his wife in accepting Mrs. Taunton's invitation, for he showed brutal indignation as he said:

"Bah! As if society people gave such things a second thought! No wonder you don't shine if you let such trifles trouble you."

Trifles! was not to save her from these "trifles" his most urgent reason why she should accept him two years ago? Was he not loudest then in resenting Miss Taunton's insults? The words rose to her lips to tell him so, but would it be any use? She felt the links she had forged sink deeper into her flesh. She spread her wings only to feel how hard were the golden bars.

"I don't want to shine in a society whose love is made up of Judas' kisses," she says, with some desperation.

He had stepped into the room, and was walking the floor like a caged animal. He stopped suddenly as she spoke.

"You don't want to shine in society! you *don't!*" and his face fairly blazed. "Well, I wish you had had the kindness to tell me that before I married you."

She looks at him with something more than astonishment. There is a startled look in her eyes, and he looks in them squarely as he says:

"Yes, I mean it—you should have told me that before I married you."

A faint redness creeps into the cheeks that have been colorless for months. Her chin is slightly elevated. She is now a faint impression of what she was the first day we met her speaking to Vere Gordon in Mr. Leighton's parlor.

"Perhaps I would have told you, had I known that was why you wished to marry me."

He does not answer at once. This phase of Edna's character surprised him. There is contempt in her words, there is defiance in her look. His manner changes instantly. If he stopped to analyze his feelings, without doubt he would find out he was pleased. He didn't think she could "flare up" like that.

Marcus Tremaine is your bullying sort of man, who likes a woman of spirit, simply for the pleasure of conquering her.

He shrinks for a moment under her gaze, and his voice is lower as he says:

"You know what I mean. A man likes to show his wife off, especially when he can do it in grand style; he likes to have his wife and his house and his entertainments and all that the talk of the town."

Edna shuddered. She does not want to be the talk of the town in that sense. She never can believe in the vulgar display her husband requires her to make; but for all that, his words had for her a stinging reproof. She always meant to please him. It was her duty to do that. The sin she committed in marrying him long since came home to her. She did not love him nor could she ever. He had not even the traits to command her respect, but she had always said:

"I will do my duty though it kill me."

Had she kept her word? No; she had spent her days in regret and sorrow, and her dreams were haunted by the face of an image that kept its place in her heart in spite of her.

She is no longer defiant. The color is gone and her lip trembles.

"I always meant to do what was right. I want to do my duty as your wife."

Sobs choke her and she buries her face in her hands.

Her defiance was too short-lived. He conquered her so easily that he is his ugly, bullying self once more, all the uglier because that word duty brought back that feeling which was roused at Mrs. Taunton's when he said to himself:

"She *does* act strangely!"

"Your duty as my wife!" he says now. "Then it is duty—simply duty—that prompts you to act where I am concerned?"

He waits for her answer, but not receiving it, he says:

"Am I to take your silence for an affirmative reply?"

She raises her face—it is a sorrowful face indeed.

"I want to please you," she says, piteously, "tell me, what do you want me to do?"

He understood the evasion. She wanted him to ask her no more questions in that line. He turned from her and walked the floor without a word, but his thoughts were busy.

"Duty! by Jove, I like that," he is thinking. "I have come upon something to-night. She has not acted strangely for nothing, and she isn't quite the angel I thought her. She has taken pains to let me know she is away above me." This is Mr. Tremaine's evil construction of Edna's conduct. Instead of taking pains to show him that with all his money he was not her equal, she tried to hide her feelings on that point. She tried to hide her feelings, but they were revealed when she could not approve of his vulgarity, when she could not listen without a dissenting voice, when he unbosomed his gambling speculations in Wall Street to her. She did not *show* him that she was above him, but he *felt* it—and now he thinks, no wonder, she acts strangely. "What was her object in marrying me? For my money, of course. She wanted to put herself in a pleasant place. Well, I'll *make* it pleasant for her in a moment."

"You want to please me?" he says, turning to her again.

"Yes," she says, eagerly, "what do you wish me to do?"

"I want you to entertain as you did a year ago. Give a ball that will astonish even the much-feted New Yorkers—will you set about it at once?"

"Yes; I shall lose no time, and it will be all that you desire," she says, quietly.

"And you will not forget to invite Cora Taunton," he says, quietly.

"Cora Taunton! Surely, you are jesting."

"I never was more in earnest in my life," he says, coolly. "Why should you think me jesting?"

"How could I think you in earnest?" said Edna, looking at him as if she doubted him still. "Our conversation not fifteen minutes ago——"

"Bah! trifles, I told you, trifles! Set your whims aside, if you please. No entertainment is complete this season without Cora. She is the rage. Think of it—engaged to a nobleman, and all that sort of thing."

He turned to go, but before he reached the threshold, she said:

"Marcus—one moment, please. I have something to say to you."

When he turned to her she was standing. He saw her hand leave her heart as if she had pressed it a moment to still some agitation.

What could she think but this man who had sworn to love and cherish her was putting upon her a deliberate insult.

It might be an insult, but he called it making it pleasant for her.

"Marcus, I want to do my duty—I want to please you——"

He interrupted her with a suppressed oath. That word duty again was too much for him.

"If you are so anxious to do your duty—your first duty is obedience, and you are to do what I ask you—to do it before I make it a command."

There is no mistaking his meaning. She takes a step forward and leans her hand on the mantel as if for support. Her eyes are flashing though her voice is calm as she says:

"Let me understand you. Do you mean to say that you will command me to receive Cora Taunton?"

"That is it exactly," he says, without a moment's hesitation; "but of course you won't compel me to do that. You will invite Miss Taunton of your own sweet will."

"*I will not.* My self-respect would be the price of my

obedience to you in this matter, and I am not willing to pay it."

He looks at her a few moments. The color is in her cheeks again. He wonders how long she will be obstinate.

"Well," he says, "we won't quarrel about the invitation. I will send it myself."

"You may invite Miss Taunton, but you cannot compel me to receive her. You had better understand that perfectly now; it would be unpleasant to have a grievous disarrangement the night of the ball."

"We shall see," he said, after a few moments' pause.

He left the room as he spoke.

"By Jove!" he thought, "I believe she could be a perfect little fury if she chose. I didn't think it was in her. I am afraid I've put my foot in it. She looks as if she meant to keep her word."

CHAPTER X.

LADY LANDIMERE.

EDNA certainly meant to keep her word. Of this her husband is more convinced next day when he asks her if she has attended to the preliminary arrangements. He introduced the subject again, to learn whether she still kept her ground.

"No," she answered, quietly, "I have no wish, Marcus, to place you in an unpleasant position; I adhere to what I said last night, and under those circumstances I did not know whether you wished arrangements to go on that never could be completed."

His face clouded, but before he could answer her there was a knock on the door, and a servant came in with a telegram for Mr. Tremaine.

It was a cablegram from Paris. It read:

"Can you come over? Important. Will be in Paris several weeks. H. L."

Tremaine's florid face fairly blazed, as he read these words with apparent agitation.

Edna is looking at him. She never saw his manner change so suddenly.

He looks at the paper a long time. If his wife knew

how those words made his heart throb. It is a call that he is only too willing to respond to.

"It is fortunate, perhaps," he is thinking. "Now I can retreat without having to give in, for I believe that is what I should have to do, for she seems as firm as a rock."

When he came to this conclusion, he looked up and started in a guilty manner.

"We won't have the ball," he says; "I am called to Paris on important business."

Edna's heart gave a bound of delight, and she has nothing to say until he rises and walks to the door.

"When are you going?" she asks.

"I shall go on the first steamer out. That will be on Saturday. I have to answer the telegram at once, and—let me see."

He paused when he caught the glad expression of her face.

"She has triumphed," he thought, "of course—of course she is glad to get rid of me. Of course, when she married me for my money, she can enjoy it all the more when I am away. I hate to do it, for she will be in my way. Yes, I hate to do it, but I will, just for spite. I'll take her with me."

"It's short notice," he says, abruptly; "but get ready. I want you to go with me."

He did not wait for her reply. He took it for granted she would go.

She dropped in the chair she had risen from as she said with a sigh:

"Well, the unexpected is sometimes fortunate. Anything but that ball. For Europe on Saturday—Europe. Were we back to Europe? I wonder——"

Instead of finishing her sentence she buried her face in her hands; then suddenly raised it, saying:

"Oh, am I mad enough to hope for such a thing? Did I not write to him that I wished never to see his face again?"

Tears rolled down her cheeks, but she hastily brushed them away, saying:

"I have no time for grief now."

She was rising when her eyes fell on the telegram her husband had dropped. She picked up the paper and

was about to throw it on the table, when her eyes took in what was written on it. This was mere chance, as she never had any curiosity about her husband's business. That it was anything else but business she had not a doubt, and when she read—

“Can you come over? Important. Will be in Paris several weeks, perhaps. H. L.,” she said:

“Umph! some speculating arrangement, I suppose. A corner in something, as usual.”

That is all she thought about the telegram to-day, but an event occurred just a fortnight later that brings every word in the telegram back most forcibly.

They are in Paris, and Edna has accepted an invitation from Lady Malverny for the opera for that evening. When Tremaine comes in to dress for dinner—he is to dine out with a party of gentlemen, he tells his wife—he says to her he is very sorry he cannot go to the opera with her, that these gentlemen are meeting at dinner for the purpose of talking over business, and he must be one of them, and to make his excuses accordingly to Lady Malverny and he will join them before the opera is over.

She takes what he says in good faith, but he has left her only a few moments when that faith receives a terrible shock. She found a note on the floor of her dressing-room. Evidently it fell from a pocket of the coat her husband had thrown in his hurry over a chair. It was a most entertaining epistle.

“My darling Marcus,” it read, “do you know I always think I am making a mistake in the spelling of your name. I am so used to the nobility. I think it ought to be Marquis instead of Marcus, but what is in a name? Nothing at all, since like all dear Americans, you are nature's nobleman. I am so sorry, dearest, that I was out yesterday when you called. Quite a mistake I assure you, but you will come to-night and dine with me, and I will try my best to make up for your disappointment. Do you know I got a dreadful scare to-day. I heard my lord was coming back to Paris. I was about to expire, but was revived by the news that he had turned up in Florence. Dear old Florence! How often have I dreamed of the lovely time we had there last fall—but, there, I won't bore you—at my old tricks you see, writing long letters. Now be punctual, and what a dear old idiot you

were to bring your wife. I shall take much pleasure in calling on her.—H.”

Edna sat motionless for one long hour with that note in her hand.

And this was the man for whom she had scourged herself because she married him without loving him. How she deplored her sin against “such a good man.” How she had striven to do her duty because she had sinned against him. And he was this.

With that thought she held up the note. He was this. She thought of the insult he offered her before they left home, and she thought of that telegram signed H. L. Was it from this woman, who signed herself H.? She believed it was.

Like one in a dream she dresses herself and awaits Lady Malvern's coming. She cannot think what step she ought to take, and she has no one in the wide world to advise her.

Lady Malvern calls, and noticing Edna's extreme pallor she cannot help asking Mrs. Tremaine if she is ill.

Edna says she thinks she has not quite recovered from the voyage, but she knows she will be better for going out.

The curtain drops on the second act of “Lucia” when there is a ripple caused by some new arrival on the opposite side of the house.

“Oh, my Lady Landimere has arrived,” says Lady Malvern, with a light laugh and a sarcastic expression. “Now,” says her ladyship to Edna, “you will have an opportunity, Mrs. Tremaine, of seeing the handsomest woman in Paris, rather that is what they say of Lady Landimere,” and Lady Malvern laughs again.

“Where shall I look?” asks Edna.

“She has just passed into the box opposite. I will let you know when she shows her beautiful face.”

But Lady Landimere did not sit so she could be seen, which greatly annoyed Lady Malvern.

“I wish you could see her; I've no doubt you will meet her though; she goes everywhere, and is always creating a sensation. She has the name of always following her husband but never catching up with him.”

"Is he always running away from her?" asks Edna, who is forcing herself to be interested.

"That is the secret. Whether his lordship leaves too soon, or his wife comes too late, are two of the things that cannot be found out. Strange she keeps behind the curtain to-night. They say she is very shy at times—perhaps this is one of her shy nights," laughed her ladyship, and Marcus Tremaine came in at her words.

"Good evening, Lady Malverny! Whose shy night is this!"

"Lady Landimere's. I want to show Mrs. Tremaine the handsomest woman in Paris, but she keeps well out of sight."

Tremaine moves uneasily as he says:

"Is Lady Landimere here? I shall have to pay my respects to her. We are old friends, you know."

There is something in his voice that makes Edna instantly suspect Lady Landimere as the writer of the note. L. was one of the initials signed to the cablegram, and when Tremaine leaves the box before the end of the act, Edna says to Lady Malverny:

"What is Lady Landimere's Christian name? Do you know, Lady Malverny?"

"I believe it is Henrietta. Yes, I remember now reading of her as Lady Henrietta Landimere."

"Henrietta Landimere," repeats Edna to herself. "I knew it; something told me H. L. were her initials."

Marcus Tremaine was so taken up with Lady Landimere, or somebody, that he did not return to Lady Malverny's box.

Edna thought the opera would never end. She knew her husband was with that woman. He had forgotten the courtesy due to Lady Malverny, even if he wished to slight his wife. Edna was humiliated and indignant as she left the box with Lady Malverny to seek their carriage alone.

"Ah, there is Lady Landimere," says Lady Malverny, as they reached the floor to the auditorium.

"There—behind your hus——"

Lady Malverny has time to say no more, for Marcus Tremaine is standing before her, saying:

"Pardon my delay, ladies; I thought I would reach your box before you left it. Edna, I want to introduce

you to Lady Landimere." He moved back and presented a beautiful woman who was a step behind him.

Edna's eyes fall on her, and a faint, gasping sound comes from her lips, and she reels, and would have fallen but her husband caught her arm.

"Edna, what is the matter?" he whispers in alarm.

She cannot speak, she cannot tell him that the woman he calls Lady Landimere came to her two years ago and claimed Vere Gordon for her husband. She cannot tell him, that but for this woman, who has now taken him also from her, she would never have been his wife.

My Lady Landimere stands for a moment like one petrified. She knows what is the matter with Mrs. Tremaine.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERY TO TREMAINE.

TREMAINE carried his fainting wife to the foyer. Lady Malvern accompanied them, but Lady Landimere did not move for some moments. She let the crowd pass her. She was not hesitating as to whether she would follow and offer her services or sympathies to the fainting girl. No; Lady Landimere had received a shock from which she did not recover at once. When she collected her senses and fairly understood what had happened she murmured:

"To meet her again, and *here*, here as *his wife*! Well, wonders will never cease!"

Lady Landimere sought her carriage as quickly as the throng would permit her.

Edna recovered in a few minutes. She stared at Tremaine and Lady Malvern and all the people who insisted, as only idle curiosity can insist, on having a peep at her.

"What has happened? What does it all mean?" she said, putting her hand to her head as if trying to think, and at the same time attempting to sit up.

"Wait a moment, dear; don't try to sit up yet," said Lady Malvern, gently keeping her prostrate.

Lady Malvern was scarcely heard, for at the same time Tremaine, bending over his wife said, crossly enough:

"Why, I was presenting you to Lady Landimere when

you fainted, and just see what a commotion you have raised."

He was angry because he was prevented from accompanying Lady Landimere to her carriage and concluding the arrangements for a little trip down the Seine to-morrow.

When he said this he hurried away, saying he wished to see that Lady Malvern's carriage was in readiness for her; but the real purpose of his hurry was the hope that he would overtake Lady Landimere. This he did not do, however, and when he returned for his wife his annoyance was ill-concealed. Yet Edna did not see it. She was thinking of Lady Landimere, and that was her one thought as they drove back to the hotel.

Can this woman, she asked herself, be the woman who two years ago claimed Vere Gordon for her husband? If she is, how comes she to be Lady Landimere? If she is! thought Edna, impatiently. As if there is room for a doubt, as if I would mistake the bold black eyes that have haunted me ever since—the bewitching face that was stamped on my memory with a fiery brand. Is this beautiful fiend my evil star? Edna groaned inwardly as she thought that two years ago this woman took from her the man who asked her to be his wife, who swore he loved her—and now she takes from her the man who made her his wife, and swore to love and honor and cherish her. How could God let such things be?

Oh, the mockery of that question! Asking Divine interference in a godless marriage. Did she ask God's blessing before she stepped to the altar? What did her nod of affirmation signify when the man of God asked her if she promised to love, honor and obey Marcus Tremain? These thoughts will come to her in the loneliness of the night, but they are not hers now. How are Lady Landimere and Vere Gordon's wife one? That was the all-important question.

Was Vere Gordon dead? The chill of death came over Edna at this thought, but why that feeling? Unknown to herself did she nurture the hope of meeting Vere Gordon again? Poor weak, womanly heart, if you could only know that Vere Gordon dead would at least be a safeguard against the cruelest misery yet! But what wife is wise at nineteen, and the weak heart grew stronger

with the next thought. Perhaps this woman was separated from Vere Gordon, that she is an adventuress figuring under the title of Lady Landimere, and that Lord Landimere is only a myth. Who ever met Lord Landimere?

The carriage stopped as Edna asked herself this question.

"I will go up to your apartment, Mrs. Tremaine. You are not well; you look so cold and white, I must see that your maid knows what to do for you."

"Oh, Edna's color need not frighten you, Lady Malvern—rather the absence of it. She never has any," said Tremaine lightly, as he stepped out of the carriage.

Edna begged her ladyship not to take the trouble, saying she was quite well now, but Lady Malvern insisted and Edna was pleased, for she was intent on asking Lady Malvern if she had ever met Lord Landimere.

They were going up-stairs, when Tremaine met a gentleman who stopped him, having something very important to say to him. The ladies reached the corridor, when Edna looked back and saw her husband lingering.

"I hope he won't come up at once, and I will have a chance to speak to Lady Malvern."

Edna's apartment was on the first corridor, and Lady Malvern took the lead and was some little distance in advance. Edna's thoughts were so busy, her footsteps were slow.

"I am sure," she is thinking, "Lady Malvern did not tell me she met him. Has any one ever met Lord Landimere? He is always gone before her ladyship arrives. Lord Landimere never appears upon the scene."

A faint cry escaped Edna's lips before this thought was finished as a gentleman turned an angle and almost ran against her. Has Lord Landimere appeared upon the scene?

The tall, bronzed, broad-shouldered man would have passed on, perhaps, but the swaying of the girlish figure, and the faint murmur made him look down at her, and with the look he put out his hand, thinking the lady needed his assistance, but the next moment his hand fell to his side, and the lady might have fallen for all he

could have done to prevent it. He recoiled, his bronzed face paled, his lips tightened with a gasp.

The swaying figure recovered itself. She looked up, her lips parted, but no sound came from them.

The man's recoil was but momentary. He looked into the woman's eyes. He stood erect, his tightened lips gave way. He raised his hat and said:

"Pardon me, Mrs. Tremaine."

It was all he said, and he went his way.

The encounter lasted but a few moments. It was so short that Edna could not believe it had taken place. She was bewildered. Had she met Vere Gordon or Lord Landimere, or was it an apparition, the outcome of her intense thoughts?

She did not look after the man of flesh and blood, or of thin air, or whatever he might be. In her bewilderment she rushed after Lady Malverny, who now had her hand on the door of Edna's apartment, and turned, expecting to see Edna at her side.

Her ladyship's hand dropped from the knob as she looked in consternation at Edna.

"Why, I thought you were with me. What has happened?"

Edna grasped her ladyship's arm.

"Look, look quickly!" and Edna pulled Lady Malverny forward and pointed to the gentleman who was about disappearing down the stairs. "Is that Lord Landimere?"

Lady Malverny was so startled by Edna's conduct that she scarcely saw the man. He was gone before she recovered her breath.

"I don't know—that is, I am not sure," stammered her ladyship. "I think the gentleman is too tall for——"

Her ladyship hesitated, and Edna, in a sort of desperation, pushed open the door, entered the room with uncertain step, and sinking in the nearest chair, said, breathlessly:

"Lady Malverny, is there such a person as Lord Landimere? Have you ever met him? Do you know him?"

"Why, Mrs. Tremaine!" and Lady Malverny's smiling look of amazement said: Whatever has got into your head? "Of course there is such a person as Lord Landimere. I am slightly acquainted—that is, I have met

him. You know he is the gentleman that always disappears on his wife's advent. Lady Landimere's husband——"

If Lady Malvern had control of her feelings she would not have paused so abruptly; she succumbed to the shock her thought gave her as she mentioned Lady Landimere's name. Was Mrs. Tremaine jealous of her husband? This was the question that rose in Lady Malvern's mind, and Lady Landimere's name presented it. Was that the cause of Mrs. Tremaine's fainting, and is her mind affected by it? Surely, this thinking she met Lord Landimere must be purely imaginary.

"Then there is such a person," Edna said.

"Yes, dear," said Lady Malvern, gently placing her hand on Edna's brow, expecting to find it feverish, but there is the reverse of fever. "How cold you are," and Lady Malvern's hand slipped down to Edna's; that, too, was like ice. "Let me ring for your maid. You must have these light clothes removed and be made warm and comfortable."

"Please do not take further trouble. Indeed, I am well, dear Lady Malvern, and—and—I want to ask you——"

The door opened and her husband came in. He came in with some bustle. His face looked brimming over with news, and he imparted it instantly.

"Edna, whom do you suppose I saw?" and he immediately answered the question himself. "Our old acquaintance, Vere Gordon. Don't you remember Cape May, Mr. Leighton's? I guess he did not see me, though I thought he looked straight at me. I don't think he could have forgotten me. He was gone before I could hail him. Vere Gordon was an Englishman, wasn't he?" It was well he did not wait for Edna's reply. She was not able to give one. "I tell you Paris is the place to meet any one you have ever run across anywhere under the sun."

"Then that must have been Lord Landimere we saw, for Lord Landimere was Vere Gordon before he came into the earldom," said Lady Malvern.

"What!" cried Tremaine, a pallor spreading over his ruddy face. "Lord Landimere—Lord Landimere in Paris! Lord Landimere was Vere Gordon!"

"I don't know whether it is the Vere Gordon of your acquaintance."

"We met him at one of our watering-places some two years ago," says Tremaine, with white eagerness.

"It must be he, for it was shortly after he returned from America two years ago, that Vere Gordon quite unexpectedly inherited his title."

There was a dead silence. Neither husband nor wife said a word in response to Lady Malvern's statement. Edna was looking blankly before her; Tremaine seemed growing whiter every moment.

Lady Malvern must be stupid indeed if she could not see that something was wrong. To say the least, they had reached an unpleasant situation, and Lady Malvern, with the tact of the woman of the world, turned the conversation to Edna's illness, and with a few sentences gracefully retired from the scene.

Tremaine was only too anxious to escort Lady Malvern to her carriage.

"Were you talking to Lord Landimere?" was almost the first thing he said to Lady Malvern.

"No, it was Mrs. Tremaine who met him. I scarcely caught a glimpse of him when she asked me if he were not Lord Landimere," said her ladyship.

"Edna met him—Edna asked you that? Why how did she know he was Lord Landimere?" said Tremaine, curiosity for the moment taking the place of the fear that had entered his heart when he realized Lady Landimere's husband was in Paris unknown to her.

"Oh, I suppose she had heard it," said Lady Malvern, who was glad she had reached her carriage.

This was a strange affair about Lord Landimere, and her ladyship was afraid of another question from Tremaine lest she should get into deep water.

Yes, it was a strange affair, Tremaine thought, as he went back to his apartment. What his lordship meant by being in Paris, unknown to his wife, troubled Tremaine. It gave him a cold, uncomfortable feeling. He had heard it was a common occurrence for the injured husband to avenge his honor at the point of the sword here in France. The thought sent a shiver over Tremaine. Could it be possible Landimere was playing the part of a spy upon his wife? And now Tremaine came to

think of it, Gordon looked at him *savagely*. Yes, Tremaine was sure he did. And the mystery to him was how Edna knew Gordon was Landimere. Well, he would clear up that mystery by asking her. And then there was something else. What the deuce did Edna faint for when he introduced her to Lady Landimere? What was her motive? She must have had one, he was sure, for women never faint without a motive.

He entered his room with the determination of probing the mystery by questioning Edna, but her maid met him on the threshold to say that she had given Mrs. Tremaine an opiate, and as she was so frightfully nervous it would not be well to disturb her.

And so the matter rested for the night, but the two interested in the matter did not rest. It was a night of much speculation and fear to the husband. He must warn Lady Landimere of her danger; but perhaps she knows now that Landimere has arrived; he may have arrived late, and was at his wife's hotel, perhaps, while she was at the opera. Well to-morrow would tell the tale. He hoped his lordship was not playing a game, and over and over again Tremaine warned himself that he must be cautious. He did not want a scandal; he hadn't thought of turning from the path of pleasure he had chosen for himself, not a thought of turning from his enchantress, but he must be cautious.

Marcus Tremaine would hate to be found out.

It would take more time than we have to give to it here to go with the wife through the hours of misery that night. There was indignation and despair—despair that grew out of her sense of loneliness. A stranger in a strange land—to whom could she tell her trouble? Who could advise her? What redress was there for her? Then came the thoughts of revenge. She could be revenged on her husband and upon this woman who had twice ruined her happiness. She could go to Lord Landimere and lay bare his wife's treachery. The thought grew upon her until she was mad with it. It gave her a wild joy. Here was a master stroke that would set both Vere and herself free, and then—then— She stopped there, and there came the fight with the evil one. The result will be known to my readers, but the struggle only to the woman and her Maker.

The stern finger of duty pointed out her way, and she must follow in it. If her husband had wandered from her, perhaps she was to blame. It was her duty to try to win him back. He married her, she thought, with the kindest of hearts, with the best of motives. Who had practiced the deception? Not he. He would not have married her, perhaps, had he known all. She married him through pique, through pride, through revenge. The world, which meant Vere Gordon, was not to know what she suffered. She would be his equal when they met again. Well, they had met and they were equal. He is the betrayed husband, she the betrayed wife. Oh, the torture of that thought! It opened an avenue of escape, but in the darkness of the night she turned from it. Vere Gordon's way and hers lay in opposite directions forever more. Her duty was to reclaim her husband. In the night she saw the long, cheerless path stretched out before her. Yet would duty be duty if it were the path we loved to tread?—the green lane that lay in the sunlight and all hedged with roses?

So through the night the man determined to follow the bent of his earthly pleasure, so long as he was not found out.

The woman went to her God.

CHAPTER XII.

TREMAINE SEES THROUGH IT ALL.

WHEN husband and wife met next morning, the usual appearance of the two was very much changed. He seemed preoccupied, pale and somewhat nervous, she looked determined, and the look of pain could scarcely be detected in the bright light of her eyes; her cheeks too had a tint that came from some inward excitement. Her work was cheerless and bitter, but a triumphant thought accompanied the incentive. Her work was to reclaim her husband from *that woman*!

"I hope you are better this morning," Tremaine said, glancing up from his morning paper, as Edna stepped into their gorgeous little *salon*.

His eyes went back to the paper scarcely noticing her.

"Oh, I am quite well, again," she answered, "and what a lovely morning it is."

There was something in the sound of her voice that made Tremaine look up at her.

The slim figure in creamy lace and cashmere and pink ribbons was a vision of loveliness. She had conquered self and her face attested the purity and refinement that enhanced her loveliness and made the dark-eyed siren in his mind pale in contrast.

"By Jove, you have a little color, you look well, extremely well," and he threw down his paper.

The pink grew deeper in Edna's cheeks, and crept up her temples. First impressions are everything, she thought. It was a propitious beginning, and it sent the color to her face.

The blush pleased Tremaine. Married two years, and she is still as simple as a child. His vanity was tickled as he looked at her. She belonged to him, and she was just lovely, but he wished she had a little more "show off" about her.

"How long will we have to remain in Paris?" she asked, as she stepped to the window and looked.

"Why, we have only just arrived. You are not tired of it before you know anything about it?"

"I am longing for Italy," she said, still looking out; "I don't think I like Paris," then with a swift motion, she turned to him and threw her arms about his neck. "Won't you take me away, please, Marcus? Can't we go to-day?"

Tremaine looked surprised, but it was not unmixed with pleasure. He was not hardened to the appeal of beauty, and this was something unusual for his wife. In his surprise he wondered what it meant. He did not answer her at once. If she had made this appeal to him yesterday he would have told her without hesitation that it was out of the question for him to leave Paris for weeks, but yesterday he was not aware Lord Landimere was in town. Perhaps he would be glad to leave for Italy to-day. He could not tell yet, and he very gracefully told his wife as much. He would see how he could arrange his business. This answer was unexpected, and it gave Edna greater courage.

"If you could leave business for awhile—it has separated us so much," she said, "and I am sure I would enjoy Italy with you."

His surprise deepened.

"Yes, I've no doubt we would have a pleasant time."

As he spoke there was a knock on the door. Edna stepped across the room and opened it. It was a note for Mr. Tremaine. Edna took the square envelope. She recognized the handwriting. She thought that never again could come such a test of her strength. She faltered but a moment, then crossing the room with a steady step, she handed him the note without a word.

His color changed. He tried to put on a careless air as he tore open the envelope. Edna walked to the table where a number of papers and magazines were scattered, and busied herself arranging them; but he did not take the opportunity to read the letter. He thrust it into his coat-pocket, but it reminded him of something he had to say.

"Edna, how was it you knew Gordon was Lord Landimere?"

The question came very unexpectedly. Edna's head drooped over the papers.

"I didn't know," she answered.

"But Lady Malverny said you did," and Tremaine looked at her without, however, entertaining a thought that there was anything on her part to be concealed.

"There must be a mistake. I asked Lady Malverny if he were Lord Landimere."

"But how did you come to think he was?" said Tremaine, with a little impatience.

"I don't know," said Edna, helplessly.

Tremaine rose a little out of temper, while he solemnly declared to himself that some women were d——d fools.

"I will see how I can manage about leaving Paris," he said, buttoning his coat. "We may be able to leave to-day."

On the stairs he read Lady Landimere's note, which said that she would be pleased to have Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine meet a few friends at her *salon* at half-past one.

This he knew was simply an invitation for himself alone. He told her ladyship last night that she must be more discreet in the wording of her epistles, especially as his wife was with him. It was a failing with him to be careless about his letters, but as he was warning the countess he

little dreamed that the mischief was already done, and the last letter of her ladyship was then in his wife's possession. He had some fear of accepting this invitation. He thought the matter over. He wanted to go. He had that to say to Lady Landimere that he would not trust on paper. Well, here was her invitation to meet a few friends. He would take it in good faith, and the risk with it, and go.

"Let me see, I promised to meet Crosby this morning—I think I'm a little late," he said, consulting his watch, as he reached the foot of the stairs. "Yes, I am, it is half-past twelve, and I haven't any time to spare. Well, I'll look in and see if he is there."

Crosby was the gentleman who detained him on the stairs last night. He represented a New York banking-house in Paris.

Tremaine walked to the reading-room where he was to have met Crosby and looked in. Crosby was not there. Tremaine was glad, but just as he was retreating from the door he caught sight of Crosby just parting with—

"Gordon as I live!" Tremaine said, referring to the man Crosby was leaving.

Gordon ran quickly as if in haste up the stairs. Crosby started for the street and Tremaine after him.

"Wait a moment, Crosby!" cried Tremaine out of breath.

"You will have to excuse me. I waited for you half an hour," said Crosby, turning for a moment.

"I saw you talking to Gordon," said Tremaine, calling his old acquaintance by the most familiar name.

"Yes, I have to transact some business for him at once, and will be closeted with him nearly all the afternoon. See you this evening."

"Where is he staying?" said Tremaine, excitedly.

"Just where you and I are staying, at the Louvre. I'll give you half an hour with him if you want it, after that he has to attend to business with me—so long!" and Crosby broke away.

"Great heavens! what does this mean? Then her ladyship doesn't know he is here. I must let her know at once. He has an appointment with Crosby for the afternoon. My way is clear."

Half an hour later he was ushered into the golden

light of Lady Landimere's presence. Her ladyship was ready to receive him, though he was early. She looked like an oriental beauty set in a golden frame. Her gown was a work of art in rich, glowing colors that set off her dark beauty against the amber hangings and ebony and gold and crystal.

She looked very much amused when Marcus made his appearance. Her smile played more freely when she saw his troubled look.

"I thought you would be early, my dear Marcus," she said, giving him her hand. "You are in trouble, you are mystified and you have come to me for a solution. Well, I can give it to you," and her ladyship seated herself among her cushions, leaned back and gave vent to her amusement in laughter.

"Then you know all—you know Lord Landimere——"

"Was engaged to your wife before you married her? Precisely," and her ladyship laughed again.

Tremaine stared at her.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, didn't she tell you all? Ah, that's what troubles you! Yes, she would have been married to him, but I stepped in just in the nick of time. I broke up the match. You can tell the sort of recollection your wife carried of me. You can tell what a sore spot is in her memory when she fainted last night at sight of me."

"Lady Landimere, are you telling me the truth?"

"Why, do not our stories correspond? What did she say about me? What did she say was the cause of her fainting?"

"She has told me nothing," and Tremaine sat down in the nearest chair with a sort of thud, the countess' laughter ringing in his ears.

She told him nothing, but her conduct of two years, of last night, of this morning, comes back, and he sees through it all. This morning he thought her a child and a fool in turn, now he thinks, Marcus Tremaine, you have been badly fooled. The fool has outwitted him—the child is a clever woman.

CHAPTER XIII.

MYSTERIOUS LORD LANDIMERE.

TREMAINE pronounced his wife a clever woman. His thoughts went back like a flash over the two years of his married life, and he thought he understood his wife's conduct now, yet he looked helplessly at Lady Landimere.

"You don't quite understand yet?" she smiled.

Her smile had the fascination of a beautiful demon. Her blue-black hair lay against the amber cushion, lips and cheeks glowed, there was a changeable light in the black eyes, and her smile showed her pearly teeth to perfection.

He looked at her a moment or two before he said:

"No, I don't quite understand it. I don't see how it could be as you say."

"No," she said, with a rising inflection that was provoking. "You have seen nothing in your wife's conduct that would make you think you were not the preferred suitor? Well, what a remarkably clever woman she must be—or is it that you are such a dear, kind, unobservant husband? Perhaps some of your sympathetic friends would say, 'poor blind man!'"

Tremaine winced, then the color came back to his face with a rush.

"Your talk is a riddle," he said as he rose and walked the floor. "How could Lord Landimere have been engaged two years ago to the lady who is my wife when he was your husband at the time? You have told me you are married six years."

"Exactly!" smiled her ladyship, but seeing Tremaine's anger rising she added: "My statements do seem confusing; but *do* be seated—here sit down beside me and see how beautifully clear I can make everything for you in a few moments."

He accepted her invitation to the seat beside her, and she put her little jeweled hand so tenderly over his, as she told him how she had married Lord Landimere more than six years ago, when he was plain Mr. Gordon. She was "the simple village maiden" of the story. There was something illegal in the form of the marriage. How was an unsophisticated country girl to know anything about forms; but when little Bea was about a year old her

ladyship discovered the flaw in the marriage, and she was horrified at the black sin, as a simple village maiden should be, and crazed with horror and grief she ran away from her husband, who was not her husband, and from her child, who she supposed was her child, but she was such an innocent young thing to be a mother, that she wasn't even sure about the child. Gordon swore that he did not know the marriage was not perfect in form, and he was willing to right the wrong. But she did not wait for him to repair the injury that had been done. She thought it was her duty to go away and bury herself and her black sin in the furthestmost ends of the earth. How was she to know what the world thought of a woman who separated herself from her husband until she had tried it? She found out that she must have been crazy when she left him and that sweet little daughter; for the daughter's sake she must go back—must go and have the marriage made right. But when she went back, Gordon was gone, and they wouldn't let her have her baby. It was under the guardianship of the aristocratic Miss Gordon, of Gordon Court. Miss Gordon looked down upon her brother's wife, because she was an innocent little country girl. Then with tears in the lustrous black eyes, Tremaine was told the pitiful story, how the lone young mother fought for her child, and procured her at last by strategem, how she followed her husband to America, traced him to Cape May, and heard there that he was very attentive—engaged—to the beautiful Miss Edna Forrest.

Here her story was interrupted by Tremaine, who said, excitedly:

“No, they never were engaged! I *don't* believe it. It might have been rumored—you know what gossips are—but there was no truth in it. He was attentive, that part is true enough—very attentive; but I was the favored suitor from the first. Miss Sarah Leighton was sure of it. I know she was by the way she invited me to accompany them to their Philadelphia house. You may take it for granted you were misinformed about Lord Landimere's engagement.” And Tremaine added the last sentence with a feeling of great satisfaction in being able to let her ladyship know that his wife was not clever enough to practice such a deception on him.

“Won’t you have patience a moment?” and she stroked his hand soothingly. “I followed you all to the Philadelphia house, and the engagement of Vere Gordon and Edna Forrest might only have been a rumor, but I chose to take it for granted, and acted boldly upon it. I forced myself upon Miss Forrest one night, and what I took for granted was true. I was sorry for her. It almost killed her.” And her ladyship described the scene that took place.

“Then my indignation rose against Vere Gordon. I determined then that he should do the right thing by me;” and the countess told how she watched Vere Gordon, and caught him leaving the Continental Hotel next morning. I confronted him with my child by my side. I threatened to go to Miss Forrest, but I did not tell him I had already exposed him, nor have I told him since. I also told him it was in my power to disgrace his family—Heaven! how I wish it was! How I would like to down that high-bred sister of his! I pushed him closely, for I saw he acted as if his brain was in a whirl, and he did as I asked him. I thought he was going to remain in America, and we were married that morning by the Mayor of Philadelphia. Do you not recognize the fact?”

“Married by the mayor!” cried Tremaine. “Then it was Vere Gordon, the guest of Mr. Leighton, that was married that morning?”

“Yes, and we left for New York at once, and I telegraphed the particulars to Miss Forrest. We left for England immediately, and within a year I was raised to my present title. It was a most unexpected thing. Vere was so far removed from the Earl of Landimere, that to inherit the title was a thing he never dreamed of. Four lives stood between him and the earldom, but strange to say, in less than a year there were five deaths; the earl and the four nearer in kin than Vere. But though Vere Gordon made me a countess, I have not forgotten him or his. He would have set me aside, only I was on the spot to prevent him and his sister. Well, she looks clear over my head even now that I am Countess of Landimere. How I hate them! Marcus, do you blame me that I have no love for him?”

She nestled closer to him as she asked the question and looked up in his eyes.

"No, I don't blame you," and he put his arm about her.

"I have no hard feelings against your wife. I was so sorry for her that night. She was so desperately in love with him. Poor girl, I shall never forget her white face."

Her ladyship dropped her eyes with a sorrowful look, then slowly raised them to see the effect of her words on Tremaine. His face was white again. His arm slipped from around her. She knew that her poisoned dart went home.

His face looked brutal and he barely suppressed an oath as he said:

"It doesn't seem possible!"

"I wouldn't let it trouble me, dear," she said in a cooing voice.

"Not let it trouble me!" he cried, rising and walking the floor.

"I don't know whether Vere ever told her the truth," she said. "When were you married?"

"That same night—the night of the day you were married by the mayor. *Think* of it!"

"Yes," said her ladyship, very slowly, "it is a clear case of pique—but of course she has learned to love you since, so what does it matter?"

Tremaine did not reply, but his thoughts were in a flying train.

Learned to love him since! What mockery. And backward his thoughts flew. He, too, remembered the white face, that November night out under the stars. She was going to post a letter, she said; a letter to Gordon, Tremaine thought now, and that night he made her Mrs. Tremaine. Yes, her face was white then, and has been white ever since. No, her cheeks were pink this morning; yes, they were pink this morning, and why? Because she saw *him* last night.

When the answer came to him, he turned upon Lady Landimere with a look that startled her.

"Do you know why I mentioned Lord Landimere when I came in?"

"I supposed she told you all about it."

"No. I was about to ask you if you knew Lord Landimere is in Paris?"

"Lord Landimere in Paris! Nonsense."

"Ah! then you don't know. He is at our hotel. I saw him last night."

"Oh! you must be mistaken. I received a telegram from him to meet him this morning in London. He wants me to meet him for the purpose of a final understanding, whatever that means," and her ladyship laughed gayly. "I telegraphed back that I had not time to indulge him in any such whim!"

"That's strange. I saw your husband last night and again this morning. Mrs. Tremaine saw him last night." And Tremaine described his seeing Lord Landimere with Crosby this morning, and what the latter had said about it.

"Your wife saw him!—that is strange. He at the same hotel and I know nothing about it!—that's stranger. But I can't believe it," and her ladyship looked mystified.

"Be careful, Lady Landimere; what does he mean by final understanding?"

"Heaven only knows; a whim as I told him. I don't mind him or his threats; they are constant."

A knock interrupted the countess. It was a telegram for her.

"Now," she said, brightening, "this is an answer to mine; this will prove to you that Lord Landimere is not in Paris."

She read it, then handed it to Tremaine, saying: "There, you see, it is from London."

It was from London. It read: "If you do not come to London at once, I shall have to compel you to do so."

It was signed with Landimere's initials.

"Now do you believe he is in Paris?" smiled her ladyship.

"Well, I don't care for your telegrams. I saw your husband in Paris not two hours ago," said Tremaine, doggedly. "It was he or his ghost."

The countess looked thoughtful.

"What puzzled me was how Edna knew Gordon was Landimere. I asked her this morning, and she evaded me. She said she did not exactly know how she knew it, she believed she had heard. Now it is very plain how she knew it."

"Ah," said the countess, with a little start, "per-

haps there is an appointment between Lord Landimere and Mrs. Tremaine; but I cannot believe he is here; if he is, he is up to something. He must have told some one in London to answer the telegram. That is the only way I can account for it," and the thoughtful expression deepened on the beautiful face.

"There has been no appointment, I am sure of that," said Tremaine, shortly. "Mrs. Tremaine told me to-day that she is anxious to leave Paris. She hates the place."

"She told you that, and you still suspect nothing?" said the countess, excited for the first time. "Ah, my virtuous Lord Landimere, I may be able to turn the tables on you yet! I believe Mrs. Tremaine must have seen Lord Landimere. She thinks there is danger for her in being near him. She wants to leave Paris because she loves him still."

Her ladyship buried her face in the cushion with a little sob.

Tremaine stood silently looking at her for some moments. He thought she spoke the truth. Edna's acting this morning was very clear to him now. To put his thoughts into words, she had fooled him most beautifully; fooled him with all his wits, and all his money. His money, with which he thought he could turn the world. And now it came to him how she had scorned him and his methods, and the things his money could do. It was a terrible blow, a revelation that staggered him for a moment, and in that moment he hated his wife.

He walked over and knelt beside the beautiful creature on the divan. This woman feasted his vanity. She made him believe he was the great man he thought himself. She, he thought, worshiped him, and his every hope was centered on her now.

"Do you care if they love each other?" he said, stroking her hair.

She sobbed again and did not look up as she said:

"I only thought of you. What do I care whether he loves her still, I was only thinking of you—but you both love her, and—and nobody cares for me."

"How can you doubt me? Haven't I sworn that I love you? You, and no other woman in all the world? Look up, love, and say you trust me."

She looked up, and she asked him again if he was sure,

very sure he loved her only. And when he reiterated his amorous vows, and her mind was settled on that point, she again expressed her doubts of Lord Landimere being in Paris, and when he became impatient, she said:

"Forgive me, dearest; but you see it is all so strange; I want you to bring me proof that he is. He is well known at your hotel—in fact at every place of note in Paris. He can't come here incognito. Will you find out from the clerk, or by looking over the register?"

"I will, and I can get the full particulars for you from my friend Crosby," interrupted Tremaine.

"Do find out what you can, and come this evening and let me know, by then I will have had time to think. Oh, if I could find out something against him! If I could enforce the terms of the separation, that I know he is longing for, then I would be even with his lordship, and Miss Gordon, and sweet cousin Amy. Cousin Amy was the wife Miss Gordon intended for her brother. She was only fourteen when he married me, but she has grown to be one of those sweet, fair creatures born to love, to comfort, and command, as their manly admirers put it. I hear my lord goes to fair Amy for comfort quite often," and her ladyship laughed.

Tremaine left her about an hour later with the promise to return in the evening with any information he had gained.

It was nearly evening when Tremaine returned to the hotel. He inquired in the office of the clerk whom he was friendly with, whether Lord Landimere was staying at the hotel? The clerk did not believe the earl was there, looked over the register, and found out he was right; Lord Landimere was not staying there. Tremaine was mystified. Crosby said Gordon was staying there.

"He was here a few weeks ago; I know his lordship well—a capital fellow," added the clerk.

"I saw him go in and out here and I heard he was staying here," said Tremaine.

"You have been misinformed," answered the clerk.

"Well, this *is* strange! I'll find Crosby, he may clear the matter."

He searched for Crosby, and found that gentleman had left the hotel not fifteen minutes before for a week's absence.

For a couple of hours Tremaine haunted the entrance and the dining-rooms, watched the guests come and go in the hope of seeing Landimere; but even the ghost of Landimere was not to be seen. He inquired of porters and waiters if they knew or had seen Lord Landimere. Many knew him well, but none had seen him for the past few weeks.

Tremaine was bewildered.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW SITUATION.

"I HAVE the strangest information for you," Tremaine said when he returned to Lady Landimere.

"Then Landimere is in town? Ah, he is up to something!" and her ladyship turned pale.

"No, I cannot prove to you he is in town; it is the strangest affair," and Tremaine told her of his inquiries. "But, great heavens, I saw the man; even if I doubted *my* senses, Edna saw him."

Lady Landimere bit her lips.

"There is something in it. He is up to something and I believe your wife knows it."

"If I thought she were playing me false," and Tremaine finished the sentence by clinching his fist.

"They are both playing us false; I will prove it to you if you will give me an opportunity. I have thought it out."

"I will give you all the ground you want to prove it on."

"Your wife wants to leave Paris?"

"Yes."

"Then listen to me," said her ladyship, quickly. "Be very kind to Mrs. Tremaine, indulge her, tell her your business will permit you to leave Paris. Say that you have fully made up your mind to have a pleasant vacation. You like country life—sport?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"Then I know the loveliest little shooting-box in England. It is to let, and you can have it for three months or a year. It is two hours from London, and just two miles from Landimere Hall. I'll telegraph my lord that

I will meet him in London without delay. I'll play the *role* of penitent, or—— Leave it to me. I will find some means to entice him to Landimere Hall, and we will be neighbors. Do you see what I am coming to? The families will meet. Gordon Court is but five miles below. Oh, what a gathering will be there!" and her ladyship laughed gayly. "Then you will have an opportunity of seeing Lord Landimere and Mrs. Tremaine together, and so be a better judge of their game."

"I'll do it," said Tremaine.

"He is an easy victim," said her ladyship to herself when Tremaine left her. "I feared he would not be so willing a tool. My time is coming. A Gordon may disgrace himself yet!"

Edna's satisfaction was intense when her husband told her they would leave Paris.

"I'll throw business over and rest for a month or two. I think I would like to take a place in the country and have a season of sport. What do you say to a nest in England?"

"Oh, Marcus, I should be delighted!" and Edna's face showed her joy.

"Then we will go just as soon as I can make the arrangements. Oh, by the way, I saw Landimere again this morning."

Tremaine's eyes were upon her. He saw the delighted look leave her face, and her lips trembled. She made no comment, and he continued:

"Too bad he did not know we were here."

"Yes," Edna said, with a little spasm.

Tremaine turned away with a grim smile. He would like to torture her with more questions, but Lady Landimere cautioned him not to say a word that might place Edna on her guard.

Tremaine became very attentive to his wife. He took her everywhere before they left Paris; she also went out with Lady Malverny and others, but she did not meet Lady Landimere again.

Lady Landimere had left for England, and in less than a week all the arrangements having been made, Edna and her husband went down into the neighborhood of Landimere Hall and Gordon Court.

The house was small, but it was cozy and elegant, and

delightfully situated; and the dearest old housekeeper in the world, as Edna thought, welcomed her.

"It seems so home-like," Edna said, looking in the smiling matronly face; "and I don't know what it is that makes me feel as if I had new life, Mrs. Bailey. Perhaps it is that delightful tea."

"Well, the tea is very good. I believe in tea; but, my dear, I think it is our air. Oh, you will get rosy here, Mrs. Tremaine; you have not been very strong, I should judge?" and Mrs. Bailey adjusted her glasses, and paid particular attention to Edna's white face.

"I have always been well," Edna said.

"Yes, but you are not strong. See what this air has done for me. I am nearly sixty."

Mrs. Bailey, in her black silk dress and white frilled cap, with erect figure and good color, looked ten years younger, and Edna told her so.

Next morning, Tremaine went off on a tramp to explore the neighborhood, as he said. Edna told Mrs. Bailey she would like to drive out and see the new neighborhood if she would go with her, and the old lady was only too glad to be of this service.

"Oh, we have a fine neighborhood, and fine neighbors too," said Mrs. Bailey, when they turned out on the road. "We are just between Gordon Court and Landimere Hall."

"What?" cried Edna.

"My dear madam, you are ill," cried the housekeeper, seeing Edna's deathly color.

"No, no; but I do not think I understood you."

"I said we were situated just between Gordon Court and Landimere Hall. Here come Miss Kate Gordon and Miss Amy Dean, now. Look at them; are they not beautiful? They are the finest horsewomen this side of the country."

On they came, dashing at high speed. One in dark green the other in blue. They were by in a moment, and all Edna could realize was that the two mounted women were a vision of fair loveliness.

"And here comes my Lord Landimere in full gallop after them," said Mrs. Bailey. "They gallop out this way every day."

In the dust Edna distinguished a horseman. She did

not wait to try to see his face; as he approached she almost fell forward.

"Good gracious, child!" cried Mrs. Bailey, thinking Edna had fainted.

The coachman drew his rein, and Edna, with Mrs. Bailey's assistance, roused herself.

"Let us go home, I feel faint," she said.

She was well enough to go on, but she feared meeting that party again. She soothed Mrs. Bailey's fears by telling her that she would be all right when she got a cup of her tea.

And when they were at home and Edna was sipping the tea, she said to Mrs. Bailey:

"Does Lord Landimere live at the Hall?"

"Not long at a time. I fear he made an unhappy marriage. His family wanted him to marry Amy Dean, the youngest and loveliest of the ladies we met, but the young lord—before he was lord—was very susceptible. He fell in love very easy; could not resist a pretty face—What is the matter? You are very nervous. I must give you something for that," said Mrs. Bailey, as Edna started when she narrated this weakness of Lord Landimere. "But he sees his folly now. He often visits Gordon Court, where Miss Amy lives, and they say it would break your heart to see the way he looks at her."

Edna shivered so that Mrs. Bailey had to hold her cup.

"To think," Edna said to herself, "that I have come to this house to hear this; come down here to meet him when I left Paris to avoid him. Is it fate?"

"You are not well, Mrs. Tremaine," began Mrs. Bailey.

But Edna interrupted her by starting up and saying:

"What noise is that? There is some commotion outside!"

Mrs. Bailey heard the noise now, and ran to the window, and in a moment she threw up her hands, crying:

"Oh, Mrs. Tremaine, Miss Dean has been hurt! They are bringing her in. She is covered with blood. There, dear, I'll go down. You are not able."

Mrs. Bailey spoke the truth. Edna was unable to speak or move. She was overwhelmed by the new situation.

CHAPTER XV.

AMY.

“ ‘I have hid my feelings, fearing they should do me wrong,
Dost thou love me, cousin?’ weeping, ‘I have loved thee
long.’ ”

EDNA listened to the commotion below, to the hurrying to and fro of footsteps, like one in a dream. She could not realize that the Gordon family was within her home in less than twenty-four hours after she had left Paris, for the purpose of avoiding Vere Gordon. This was the fact with which she tried to grapple.

The clattering of horses’ hoofs roused her. She started to the window. One of the grooms was departing at full speed.

He is going for medical aid, Edna thought; the young girl must be injured badly, perhaps seriously. Edna felt it was her place to go down-stairs at once, but how could she meet him?

While she was struggling to set her own feelings aside, and to think of what the occasion demanded of her, Mrs. Bailey came up, looking very grave.

“I was troubled about you, my dear child; these shocks are not good for you——”

“How is the young lady?” interrupted Edna.

“She is still unconscious. She slipped from her horse and was dragged over the stones. Her head is cut badly, and she has lost a good deal of blood, but let us hope it won’t be serious. I wish you would have your maid with you, Mrs. Tremaine; I don’t feel right to leave you alone, and I want to go down again.”

“Who is down-stairs?” said Edna, eagerly.

“Only Miss Gordon and the servants, with Miss Amy, poor, dear child——”

“Where is Lord Landimere? I thought you said when we met them in the wood he was with them.”

“Yes, he was, but unfortunately he’s gone—left for London not twenty minutes ago. They cantered to the station, while he went to the Hall and changed his clothes. They saw him off, and were coming home when the accident happened. Miss Gordon said she was so sorry he was gone, but she hoped the accident would not prove

serious enough to call him back; I'm sure she feels very much alarmed about Miss Amy."

Edna's heart throbbed with relief when Mrs. Bailey told her Lord Landimere was gone.

"I'll go down at once," she said.

"Oh, no; please take my advice, Mrs. Tremaine. You are not strong; wait until after the doctor has seen her," pleaded Mrs. Bailey, in alarm.

"Oh, I am well now—quite strong, very strong. I must go down. I am sure Miss Gordon will feel better when I make her welcome."

Mrs. Bailey looked admiringly at her young mistress.

"She has a good heart," the old lady commented, inwardly; then aloud: "Well, my dear, if you are sure you can stand it I know Miss Gordon will feel better for seeing you."

They went down together, and Mrs. Bailey introduced Edna to Miss Gordon, of Gordon Court.

"Mrs. Tremaine, I cannot tell you how deeply I regret this intrusion, but Miss Dean became unconscious, and I did not think it safe to carry her further," said Kate Gordon, as she held out her hand to Mrs. Tremaine.

Edna's eyes unconsciously ran over the tall, queenly figure before her. She noted the perfect contour, the handsomely turned white throat thrown into bold relief by the rolling collar of the habit, and the backward carriage of the head, the chin that showed strength of character, the downward curves at the corners of the handsome mouth, the frank, gray-blue eyes, and the wealth of pale golden hair, massed low at the back of her head, under her riding hat.

Every feature was scanned for a resemblance to Vere Gordon, yet Edna found none, unless it was an expression in Kate Gordon's eyes. That expression, with the curve of her lips, in spite of her present anxiety, proclaimed her strongest trait to be a quick perception of the humorous.

Lord Landimere declared that his sister Kate had all the wit and humor of the Gordon family, which declaration greatly disgusted my Lady Landimere, who declared in turn that she never could see anything *funny* in Kate Gordon.

Of course she couldn't, and her ladyship's color-blindness can readily be explained.

Kate Gordon saw the humorous side with the first glance, and she was bewitchingly droll over it; but she was true to life. Shams found no place in her toleration. Being a woman of deep penetration, she understood women thoroughly. She said she had seen beautiful dolls made of sawdust—they could talk, too; and there were any number of sticks dressed like women and acting like women; but no stick could come to her in fine raiment and finer sentiment. The point of her humor ripped the raiment and took the sentiment, and—lo! the sawdust.

And who wants the sawdust exposed? Was it any wonder Lord Landimere's fascinating consort could see nothing *funny* in Kate Gordon?

In spite of the state of alarm Miss Gordon was in, her frankness, and that genial glow that was an addition to, rather than a detraction from, her high-bred manner, made an impression on Edna. She felt her whole being go out to Vere Gordon's sister as she touched her hand. She trembled violently, swayed by the strength of an emotion that mystified her, as she said:

"Miss Gordon, I should feel very much hurt if I knew you passed our door in your distress, and I hope you will do just the same as if you were in your own home. Let us trust the injuries will be very slight; but, if they prove otherwise, will you remember that I am alone here with my husband—that I am a stranger with all the long hours on my hands, and I will consider it a great pleasure if you will allow me to help you nurse Miss Dean."

A tear gleamed in the gray-blue eyes, and Kate Gordon looked at the slight girlish figure. It was a few moments before she spoke. In those few moments she thought:

"She looks so young to be a wife, and she has some trouble." Then, with a touch that was Kate Gordon's own, she held Edna's hand, as she said, humbly:

"You are very kind to us, Mrs. Tremaine, and Amy herself will thank you for it some day. Ah, her eyelids fluttered. She is coming to!"

Edna turned to the beautiful girl lying on the sofa.

She was shorter and slighter than Miss Gordon; the colorless face was more perfect in outline; the mass of flowing hair, partly dyed with blood, had a deeper tinge of gold than Kate's, and the eyes that stared at Edna for an instant were of the blue of the violet.

Edna did not move. The fluttering eyelids drooped; a mumbling sound came from the girl's lips, and she was again unconscious. Mrs. Bailey, who had partly succeeded in stanching the flow of blood, was seated beside her. Kate sank on her knees at the sofa when she thought the girl was recovering her senses.

"Amy," she said, catching her hand—"Amy! won't you speak to me? My, how hot her hand is!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bailey, with a shake of her head that was not encouraging, "I think there will be some fever. I wish the doctor were heré."

Edna could not take her eyes from the girl's face. And this is Amy, she thought; Amy, who should have been Vere Gordon's wife; Amy, to whom he came for comfort now. Had he learned to love her too late? Did she love him all these years? Loved him before he and Edna had met! The thought was torture. There was some comfort in knowing there was no love between Gordon and his wife; but to know that another loved him, and to think that maybe he loved that other, was indeed new anguish. Yet, with all the torture of that thought, Edna's heart went out in pity to Amy. And why not? Could any living mortal know better than Edna what Amy Dean suffered? If Edna had a doubt of that suffering, it vanished later.

Again and again Amy muttered something unintelligible, before the doctor came, and a few times she opened her eyes suddenly, but there was not a gleam of recognition in them. Her head was growing better, and the color was deepening in her cheeks and lips.

The doctor came, and said she had a couple of ugly scalp-wounds, and besides, she had had a nervous shock. While he dressed the wounds, she became very restless, and began to talk incoherently. When the doctor administered something to allay the fever, he turned to Edna and said:

"Mrs. Tremaine, I am sorry, but I do not think it

would be well to remove Miss Dean in her present condition."

"Doctor, I hope you will not give it another thought. I have already said as much to Miss Gordon. I am only too pleased to be of some service."

"How was Miss Amy unseated? Was the horse frightened?" asked the doctor, when he had done all he could for Amy.

"I can't account for it," answered Kate, whom he had addressed. "We came up the road from the station all right, and we thought we would shorten our way by cutting through the lane this side of the Hall. We were not more than a few yards into the lane when I saw Lady Landimere; I don't know whether Amy saw her, but something came over Amy, for she turned to me, and her face was as white as a corpse, and she was about to speak, when she slipped from her seat. I believe she suddenly lost her strength. Fortunately, one of the men from the Hall came running to our assistance, or I don't know what I should have done."

"Did she speak after she fell?" asked the doctor.

"Yes; she said, 'Don't take me there;' she meant to the Hall. It was all she said."

When Kate said the accident took place in the lane near the Hall, Edna wondered why Amy was not taken there, now she understood why. Amy did not want to go there, and Edna believed Amy's seeing Lady Landimere had something to do with the accident. And late that night she was confirmed in her belief. Kate Gordon retired, weary with watching and attending Amy, and Edna, who had rested during the evening, remained with Mrs. Bailey at Amy's bedside.

Amy talked constantly as her poor burning eyes rolled from one to the other. Her words were plain at times, so plain that they wrung Kate's heart.

"She talks of Vere all the time," said Mrs. Bailey, when she and Edna were alone with the sick girl. "Vere is Lord Landimere," explained Mrs. Bailey. "I am afraid the poor child is heart-broken. She should have been his wife, and to think of his choosing one so far beneath her. His lordship was not very strong-minded, or he might be free from this marriage that, I'm sure, is hateful to him now."

"How could he be free?" asked Edna, trying to conceal her interest.

"Well, it came out that there was something wrong about the license—that the marriage was not legal. His people found it out and raised a dreadful time about it; and Hetty, as they called Mrs. Gordon then—she is Lady Henrietta now—ran away. She was as fickle as she was pretty in those days, and I think my lady bears the same name to-day. I believe she was glad of a loop-hole to escape the matrimonial bond, for the story goes that Vere Gordon wanted to make the marriage legal, but Hetty vowed he intended to wrong her from the first, and she never could live with him or forgive him. So she disappeared, leaving a little daughter a year and a half old to Kate Gordon, who rejoiced, thinking she was rid of Hetty forever. For two years nothing was heard of her, when she suddenly appeared in the neighborhood and stole the child she had deserted. She fled with it to America, where Vere Gordon had gone. Poor fellow! he wouldn't harm a hair of her head; but he was glad she took it upon herself to leave him; and they say he considered himself a free man, and was beginning to enjoy life again; but she came to him suddenly with her child, and demanded he should right the wrong he had done. It must have almost killed him to take her back, but he did it; I guess it was for the child's sake, and there was another marriage performed in the States—some strange sort of a civil marriage, I believe, before a magistrate. However, she is my Lady Landimere now, sure enough. My! how the poor child raves!" said Mrs. Bailey, turning her attention to Amy, after concluding her story.

That story Edna thought made Vere Gordon's conduct as clear as day. Now she understood the letter he wrote her as she had never understood it before. There was nothing blameworthy in his conduct toward her. There was no sin in it. He loved her and asked her to be his wife. And he had the right to do so, as he believed himself a free man. In his mad love for her he asked her to be his wife before he told her the story of his life. That was imprudent, but there was no crime in it. How vividly the scene came back to her, when she ran out of the house tortured by the taunts of Cora Taunton, and by her love for him. Again she hears his footsteps behind

her in the cedar-walk—again she hears his words of passionate love, and feels the strength of his arms around her, and the touch of his lips on hers, and then came the letter—the letter in which he begged her to call him back so that he might tell her all with his own lips—the letter in which he scourged himself for deceiving her, and stamped himself a fraud and all things contemptible. Oh, what he must have suffered in his struggle to do right, and what solace did she send! Her answer to that letter comes back in words of fire.

“Vere Gordon, you have played the part of a villain. I never want to look on your face again.”

And now his name rings in her ears—rings through the room from the lips of the sick girl—the girl who loved him truly. Did he love Amy now?

“Vere, Vere! I want you, Vere!” called Amy.

Edna slipped down on her knees, buried her face in the coverlet, and wept.

“Hush, my dear,” and Mrs. Bailey smoothed Edna’s hair. “Don’t cry, she has been going on that way for an hour.”

Was she crying for Amy or for herself?

“Vere, Vere, take her away. Don’t let her touch me, Vere.”

Edna looked up. Could Amy mean her? Mrs. Bailey saw the look, and said:

“She means Lady Landimere, I think.”

“Yes, Lady Landimere!” cried Amy, catching at the name. “She hates Vere. She hates me. Oh, those eyes, how they burn me! Don’t let her look at me, Vere!”

“Poor child, you see how it is with her,” said Mrs. Bailey. “She loves him.”

“Who told you that?” cried Amy, looking straight at Mrs. Bailey, and appearing conscious for a few moments, as people in a raging fever sometimes do. “I never told any one—he doesn’t know—he will *never* know, and I have loved him so long, so very long. But I have hid my feelings so well, haven’t I?” and she appealed to Edna, whose tears fell like rain.

“He is so unhappy, can’t you see that? I wouldn’t mind, only he is so unhappy—you know that, don’t you? Can’t you do something for poor Vere?”

Edna sobbed aloud.

"Mrs. Tremaine, this is too much for you—you cannot stay here."

"What are you crying for?" asked Amy, distinctly, then she wandered off into something unintelligible.

"Let me cry; you don't know how much good it does me," sobbed Edna. "I cannot leave her."

And she remained all night at Amy's bedside.

Strange fatality that brought these two women together, who thought they loved one man!

CHAPTER XVI.

IN TROUBLED WATERS.

WHEN Lord Landimere left his sister and Amy on the road, he went, as they said, to change his riding-dress for a traveling suit, to go up to London.

He was about completing his toilet for his journey, when his handsome wife, bedecked in the usual gorgeous array, flounced into his dressing-room.

"Now you are off for London—almost ready to go—and I haven't had a chance to speak to you to-day. Staid at the Court, as usual, until the last moment."

Her ladyship—as she had told Tremaine she would be—was on her best behavior. She spoke with sweet petulance, and sunk into a chair directly behind his lordship, where she could have full view of his face in the glass.

"I was here half the morning," said his lordship, curtly, as he fastened his necktie. "If you had anything very particular——"

"Oh, it was nothing very particular, only it was something I thought you would like to know," said her ladyship, sweetly. "I wanted to tell you the 'Nest' had new tenants."

"Well?" said Vere, in a tone that meant, "What is that to me?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine are our new neighbors."

"Tremaine—Tremaine? Don't know them," he said, with an unconcern so natural it stunned her ladyship.

He buttoned the last button of his vest, pulled it down, to make it set shapely, and as he gave it the final whisk, he called out to his valet, who was packing a portmanteau in the next room:

"Madden, don't forget my heavy coat; this fine weather may not last."

He acted as if he had entirely dismissed the name that her ladyship thought would come upon him somewhat in the manner of a bomb-shell.

Lady Landimere bit her lip with disappointment. He had studied his part well, she thought.

"Yes, you do know the Tremaines; they are old acquaintances of yours. You met them in the States," she said.

He was putting on his coat, and he paused a moment.

"Tremaines! Met them in America?" he murmured.

She saw his face in the glass. It had a look of perplexity so natural that it maddened her, and she said, rather briskly:

"Yes! Don't you remember a Mr. Marcus Tremaine? And Mrs. Tremaine was Miss Edna Forrest."

"Forrest! Edna Forrest!" and his lordship looked straight before him, and met his astonished face in the glass. "Why, I remember her well, and true enough, she did marry Marcus Tremaine—eloped with him;" and Lord Landimere turned to his wife. "It was the night you came——" His lordship paused abruptly, frowned, and compressed his lips at the remembrance, then went on reflectively: "Well, well! so the Tremaines are down here? I wonder how the marriage turned out? She was a very attractive young lady—bright, charming—inclined to be intellectual. I wonder how she looks now?"

He asked the question of himself, and turned again to the glass.

His perfectly natural manner was too much for the countess. It exasperated her, it threw her off her guard.

"I don't think she has changed much in a week. How did she look when you saw her a week ago in Paris?"

"I saw Mrs. Tremaine a week ago in Paris? My dear madam, may I say you are dreaming? I haven't seen Paris for more than a month."

"You *were* in Paris last week, for Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine saw you at their hotel——" She paused; she was watching his face in the glass. He looked very much amused. "I met Mr. Tremaine at the opera, was introduced to him, and he said he saw Lord Landimere twice within twenty-four hours at his hotel. I am sure I do

not know what your object was to be in Paris unknown to me. Let me tell you I was not going to say anything about it, only you denied seeing the Tremaines."

"This is very funny," smiled his lordship. "Did Tremaine say he spoke to me?"

"No, you were gone before he could speak to you."

"Did Mrs. Tremaine speak to me?"

"No," said her ladyship, doggedly.

"I was also gone before she could speak to me. Ghosts always vanish into thin air, you know. My dear madam, if you think I was in Paris you will be simply believing in a snare."

Her ladyship did not want to bring his lordship to a reckoning now, but she could not bridle her tongue.

"Where were you Wednesday a week ago?" she asked.

"In London, my dear" (sarcastically), "at the house of Lord Moffat and his wife. I spent the week there; wrote and telegraphed you from there, and if you want a certificate of character of me for that week, I think Lord and Lady Moffat will oblige you. If you meet the Tremaines, remember me to them, and say to Mrs. Tremaine that I will surely call the first moment I have to spare when I come back. Good-bye."

There was no affectionate leave-taking. Affection between these two was buried forever. Her ladyship made a pretense of it at times, to suit her purpose, but it failed to deceive her husband. He could live but few days at a time under the same roof with her. He was not a hypocrite. When he had tried to do right by her, she did not appreciate it. She spurned him, she scorned him and his love, and he never troubled her with it now. He tried to get along peaceably with her, and he tried for nothing more.

When he said good-bye he walked out, and a few minutes later her ladyship heard the rattle of the carriage-wheels that told her his lordship was gone.

Then she fumed and took on the ways of a mad-woman. She never thought Vere Gordon, Earl of Landimere, a clever fellow; she thought she had turned him round and round at will. She had no respect for the man that blushed easily, and Vere colored like a girl when he made the least attempt at subterfuge. She did not think he

could look in her face and deceive her, but the last fifteen minutes scattered her estimate of him to the winds.

Vere Gordon, Earl of Landimere, was not a milk-sop, for that was exactly what this deceitful, adventurous young woman surmised her lord to be. No, Vere *was* clever. After the last fifteen minutes she would give him the palm for evermore for his shrewdness and cleverness.

"He is playing a deep game, but I will be a match for him yet," she said. "How naturally he said he would call on Mrs. Tremaine when he came back. Well, let him; that is just what I want."

She dressed herself and went out for a walk. She came suddenly, as Kate Gordon said, on Kate and Amy coming from the station. It was the suddenness of her appearance, and the way she looked at Amy Dean, that caused the accident.

Lady Landimere walked on, knowing nothing of the injury that befell Amy. She crossed by-road and high-road, over meadow and hedges, and in a lonely dell quite out of sight of road and hall, she met Marcus Tremaine.

This was to be their meeting-place until the way was opened for him to come to the Hall.

The countess told him without delay that her husband was gone for a month or more, and that he could come to the Hall when he pleased. Then she told him very minutely of what passed between his lordship and herself just before his departure. She imitated even Vere's gesticulations.

"You never saw anything so natural in all your life," she said. "I can't help feeling perplexed."

"Let him alone; I am sorry you said anything; the least word may put him on his guard. We must give him rope enough to hang himself. He is very, very deep. Too bad he went away; it delays us just a month," said Tremaine, thoughtfully.

"It will give the families time to become acquainted," laughed her ladyship, but her laugh did not chase away her troubled look.

Her lord troubled her for the first time in her life.

The way was clear, and Tremaine called at the Hall that evening with startling news.

The families were already acquainted. The ice was

most beautifully broken, as Marcus Tremaine expressed it. Kate Gordon and Amy Dean were domiciled for the present at the Nest, and Tremaine explained the accident.

"Well, what an auspicious event for us! I suppose the proper thing would be for me to call to-morrow," laughed the countess.

"It is not a bad idea; if you intend to call at all, now is the time. I believe fortune has favored us."

"Oh, yes, I must call," said she, gayly; "*I am* in the family, you know. Even the Empress Kate cannot get over that fact, much as she would like to. We must be on visiting terms, you know, or we can never throw them together. Oh, yes, we must be very friendly, and here is my golden opportunity."

Edna having remained up all night, did not rise until luncheon hour next day. Then she remained in her room, thinking over the position in which she was placed. She felt that she was getting deep into troubled waters. Here she must remain until this young girl was well enough to leave the shelter of her roof. In that time could she avoid meeting Lord Landimere? She felt it would not be as safe to meet him now that she had heard Mrs. Bailey's story. She knew she was growing weaker. The good resolutions she made in Paris were slipping from her as she faced this double perfidy of her husband. She knew it was a preconcerted plan that made her a neighbor of Lady Landimere. She felt her husband's treachery all the more bitterly because her husband deceived her while he pretended to be humoring her by taking her from Paris. What could she expect from a man that would betray her in this way? How was she to deal with him?

Before she could attempt to answer this question, a maid came in with a card, on which Edna read:

"Countess Landimere."

CHAPTER XVII.

LADY LANDIMERE'S CALL.

THE instant Edna understood who her visitor was, a righteous indignation came to her rescue and shaped her course of action.

Her husband had crossed the ocean at this woman's call; he had come down here to be near her, making a pretense the while of humoring his wife, and Edna remembered the mocking line in the letter she had found from my lady to Marcus Tremaine. "I shall take great pleasure in calling on your wife."

Edna smiled half in bitterness, half in scorn, as she thought of the "pleasure" Lady Landimere would receive from this call.

All the determination in Edna's character, which was not a little when put to the test, came to the front now. She must take her stand just here. Her womanhood, her self-respect, called out to her to let this creature's effrontery and Tremaine's base treachery go no further. He was untrue, but by her truth she meant to win him back. He would not let her do it. He forced an insult upon her that she would not accept.

She took her stand, she said to herself: "There is no power on earth that could make me receive that woman." Then raising her eyes that were intent on the card, to the maid who was awaiting her orders, she said, calmly:

"Say to the lady who gave you this that Mrs. Tremaine is not at home to the Countess Landimere."

The maid pricked up her ears, and paused a moment. She was a well-trained servant, and not used to making comment, but she couldn't believe she had heard aright.

"I am afraid I haven't the message just right, madam."

"Say that Mrs. Tremaine is not at home to the Countess Landimere. Be sure and repeat these words," said Edna, in the same unruffled voice, and she thought: "Now, then, Marcus Tremaine can come to me for a reason for my conduct."

The maid left the room quickly. She chuckled as she went down-stairs. She had been in service at Gordon Court, and had her opinion of Lady Hetty, and Mrs. Tremaine's words were a sweet morsel.

"Not at home to *me*! Why, what does she mean?" said her ladyship, bristling with humiliation, surprise and anger.

She had not yet acquired the Vere de Vere control of feeling.

"I did not ask my mistress what she meant, my lady."

"Well, I wish your mistress to understand that it was

only a matter of courtesy for me to ask for her. I had no desire to see her. I came to see Miss Dean. Not at home to *me*! The idea. What airs the beastly Americans take upon themselves when they come among their betters."

"Miss Gordon is here, my lady; shall I tell her——"

"Yes, you may say that I have called," snapped her ladyship, and when the girl disappeared she said: "Very well, my dear Mrs. Tremaine, I will get most beautifully even with you for this. My day will come, if I have to work every minute for it."

There was a strength about this phraseology that made Lady Landimere more satisfied with herself than more elegant mental comments could have done. We suppose on the principle that one always feels better when one is natural. If her ladyship was compelled to guard her phrases in talking to others, she could have the gratification of a good plain talk with herself now and then.

She was quite ready for Miss Gordon when she heard the rustle of that young lady's skirts, and her ladyship was not at all abashed by her queenly air when she entered the room.

Indeed, why should the countess be abashed? Who was Lord Landimere's sister, anyway? was the question her ladyship asked herself, for the purpose of answering herself with much gusto. She was just plain Kate Gordon, who took upon herself airs and graces that belonged to none but the aristocracy. We doubt very much that her ladyship believed this, or Kate Gordon's conduct could not annoy her as it did; but she acted on the strength of this belief, whether it was hers or not, and she said, very airily, with just a touch of patronage, as she rose to meet Miss Gordon:

"Oh, my dear Kate, what an awful misfortune has befallen you——"

"No; it befell Amy," said Kate, beginning the conversation just as her lofty sister-in-law did, whom she had not seen for some months.

"Yes, yes; I know Amy was hurt, but you have to take care of her. I wanted to come the moment I heard it, but I heard she had been cut dreadfully, and the very thought of blood made me feel faint."

"I am sorry for you," said Kate, the curve at the corners of her lip deepening.

"Yes; I am sure you would be if you knew what dreadful sensations I experience."

"Is it dizziness?" asked Kate, in a tone of most innocent inquiry.

"Yes; something like that," said her ladyship, reflectively.

"Perhaps it is your liver," suggested Kate, and there was a little twitch perceptible about her lips as she said: "And now I think of it, you are a very bad color at times."

"Oh, do you think so?" and the countess looked at herself in alarm in a mirror opposite. "Perhaps it is the shade of red in my bonnet. It is a Tivot bonnet, too, and I thought it was charming."

"Oh, the bonnet is lovely, and very becoming—just the sort of bonnet a countess should wear," said Kate, so seriously that her ladyship rose instantly and turned herself slowly around before Kate, and asked:

"What do you think of my costume?"

Amy was forgotten. Her ladyship had found a more interesting subject—herself and her dress. And now she was sure the weapon was in her hand with which she could give Kate a stab. The countess called Kate's elegant, plain dressing "dowdy."

"Worth made it," said her ladyship, after she had given Kate time to survey it.

"It is an exquisite creation, and one would know it was Worth's taste the moment one looked at it."

The countess was delighted. She hadn't an idea of her own about dress, and she failed to detect Kate's sarcasm.

"The only thing I don't like about it is this dart," said her ladyship, touching her waist. "It sort of broadens me, spoils my figure—don't you think so?"

"Indeed, your ladyship should find no fault with your figure—it is a lovely one to try fine garments on."

The countess gave a little start. She wasn't quite sure how to take Kate's words. They had a suggestion about them that she ought to occupy the position of "figure" in some costume establishment.

Kate filled the awkward little pause by most blandly

asking her noble sister-in-law if she would not excuse her now, as she had to go back to Amy.

"Oh, yes," said the countess, recovering herself at once. "Poor, dear Amy, how is she to-day?"

"Well, she is quiet this morning—much better, I hope."

"Oh, dear, I wish I could be of some help to you, but I am so utterly useless; you know I never was taught to do anything."

"Why should you be, since you were destined for the nobility. An actual necessity makes us plain folk useful."

The countess laughed, as if she took it for granted Kate was joking. Then she asked if she could see Amy.

"The doctor advised me to let her see no one," answered Kate,

"Oh, then I won't keep you longer. I'll call when she is better. How strange for you to have dropped in here?" said the countess, inquiringly.

"The house is tenanted now," said Kate.

"Yes, I have the honor to know the occupants," and the countess laughed.

Kate gave her a haughty stare, as she asked:

"Have you met Mrs. Tremaine?"

"Once in America, once in Paris, when she fainted at the sight of me, and to-day she refused to see Lady Landimere." Her ladyship felt sure Kate would hear it, and she wanted to give Kate something to think over before she left.

Kate looked, without speaking, at her ladyship.

"Oh, I see you don't understand me, my dear Kate. Why, only for my timely arrival in America, there might have been a big litigation in the Gordon family. Mrs. Tremaine, before she was Mrs. Tremaine, came within an inch of being your sister-in-law. How would you like her? Ask Vere when he comes back—he'll tell you all about it. Good-bye, dear—love to Amy. Awfully glad to see you after all this time," and Lady Landimere was gone.

Kate did not move. Could it be possible her brother's wife spoke the truth? She doubted it. A light footstep on the stairs roused her, and the next moment she saw Mrs. Tremaine in the hall. Kate watched her a few mo-

ments before stepping out to greet her. How beautiful she looked, and so childlike for a wife! Then Edna happening to look in as she passed on her way to Amy, their eyes met, and Kate walked out and took her hand, saying:

"Good-morning, Mrs. Tremaine. I did not expect to see you so soon."

Edna said she was quite rested and strong, and hastened to inquire for Amy.

Kate watched her as she spoke, and she was sure the beautiful brown eyes told a history of sorrow. Was that sorrow disappointed love? Kate thought Edna might mention Lady Landimere; she hoped she would, and was disappointed accordingly when Edna seemed to entirely forget that her ladyship had called.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE GLOAMING.

TOWARD evening Tremaine was coming home. He had been spending part of the afternoon with Lady Landimere. Her ladyship had related the particulars of her visit to the West, but made him promise that he would not say a word to Edna, as it might put her on her guard, and spoil everything.

"Patience," continued her ladyship; "our turn will come by and by."

And Tremaine promised to be patient, promised to say nothing; his own judgment told him that was the best policy, but it was a policy terribly hard to follow under the circumstances.

This husband, who considered his honor outraged, could not explain the different shades of his emotions to the lovely countess.

"To think that I have put up with this treatment a single hour," he said to himself, as he stalked home in a rage. "The idea of her daring to show her jealousy of Lady Landimere so openly. I'd like to know what excuse she would make to me if I asked her for one. To think she does not care a snap of her fingers for me, that she believes me to be a blind fool, and I have to let her believe it."

This was the sorest spot in Tremaine's feeling. It did

not cost him a thought that he did not care for his wife, or that he was making a fool of her; but to think that she did not care for him! It was very hard, under the circumstances, for him to contain himself; very hard, with his anger choking him, for him to say to Edna, when he arrived at home and found her alone in her little boudoir:

“Well, how is your fair patient this evening?”

“Much better. There has been a wonderful improvement to-day. Her fever is nearly gone.”

“Ah! that’s good. Have you had any callers to-day? Some of Miss Gordon’s friends came, I presume?”

For his life he could not help asking the question. He was sure Edna would deny Lady Landimere’s call, and he asked her, that, on a later day, he might cast up what a liar she was.

Judge his surprise at Edna’s answer.

“I expected you home shortly, and I came up here from Miss Gordon, that I might see you alone for awhile. Our only caller to-day was Lady Landimere. She asked to see me, and I told the maid to say I was not at home to the Countess of Landimere.”

Tremaine changed color, and he turned his face from his wife. Now was the time for his questions—now was the time to hurl at her his accusations. With a struggle he held his breath. He remembered her ladyship’s caution, and tried to follow it.

“Well, wasn’t that a rather strange proceeding?” he said, after a long pause.

“Was it?” said Edna, with a sneer that her indignation would not let her suppress.

He paused again, then, in a voice choking with restrained passion, he said:

“How should I be able to answer that question?”

“Ask your conscience whether there is no reason why I should not receive Lady Landimere? Ask your conscience whether it was to humor me you left Paris? Mr. Tremaine, if you have the least respect left for me you will take me from this house the moment the young girl below is fit to be removed.”

His anger was gone. There was no mistaking her words. His heart quaked with fear. He was obliged to defend himself now. It was all that was left him to do.

"How should I know that you had anything against Lady Landimere?" he said, turning upon her savagely. "What is it? You haven't told me." He saw her shrink at his words, and now he was determined to bully her. "Come, what is your secret? As for bringing you to this house, I brought you just as I explained to you, and under no other pretense."

"It is false, and, Marcus Tremaine, you know it," she said, recovering from the shock the allusion to her secret gave her, "and I won't remain in this house!"

"Well, you *will* remain here just as long as I wish you to," he said, advancing threateningly toward her. "I am not going to humor you by changing my residence every week. If you have any accusations to make against me, make them in the proper way, and you will find I will be ready to meet them."

He left the room with this threat, but his air of triumph left him the moment he crossed the threshold. Edna suspected him and Lady Landimere. The tables were turned. He made haste with the news to the countess. They talked it over together, and she said:

"You must stay here until he comes back. We must get evidence against them—we must be first. It is our only chance now."

Next day Tremaine told his wife that she might be prepared at any time to return to America, adding, with a laugh, that he didn't think Europe agreed with either of them, and that he was quite sure an ocean voyage would restore their former health.

Edna accepted what he said in good faith, little dreaming it was a ruse to keep her quiet. She thought he might be sorry for his conduct, and wished to place the ocean between himself and the countess. As the week passed, Edna did all she could to please him, and she even planned, if he proved sincere, to tell him all about herself and Vere Gordon, for she suspected from his words that the countess must have already told him something.

But a week passed, and Amy rapidly recovered; another week, and she returned to Gordon Court deeply in love with Mrs. Tremaine. And still no word from Tremaine about returning to New York. Instead, near the end of the third week he told Edna he had to go up to

London for a few days, perhaps a week, to attend to some business he had neglected, and if everything was satisfactory, they would leave the Nest on his return.

Edna's heart sunk, but there was no help for it but to depend on his word.

The day Tremaine went away Kate Gordon and Amy called. Edna told them of Mr. Tremaine's plan and their early return to New York.

"Oh," cried Amy, "you won't go so soon? Why, we haven't had a chance to see you since I got well."

"I am very sorry, but we must go," said Edna.

"Dear me! I wanted you to meet my cousin Vere. He will be at the Hall in about ten days."

Edna said nothing, but Kate saw her expression change, and she said on the instant, so that Amy would not notice Edna's embarrassment:

"Well, we must have you for the next few days, Mrs. Tremaine. Now that Mr. Tremaine is gone, there is nothing to keep you here."

Amy's violet eyes sparkled, and she clapped her hands in ecstasy, as she cried:

"Oh, yes! Now please don't refuse, Mrs. Tremaine; we shall have a delightful time. Sir Robert Conway is coming. See Kate blush! Sir Robert and Kate are to be married in the spring."

"I am delighted to hear that," said Edna.

Kate was blushing beautifully, but she managed to say:

"You will come this very day, and stay until Mr. Tremaine comes back."

Edna was thoughtful a moment. In those few days there was no danger of her meeting Vere. Why shouldn't she go? No objection presented itself, and that evening found Edna and Amy at the piano, in the beautiful music-room at Gordon Court.

Amy was playing; Edna was singing, and singing as she had not sung for two years. There was some soothing influence she could not explain about the place. It was just before dinner. Daylight had almost faded away, and the blaze of the wood-fire partly lighted the room.

"I come down here every evening at this hour, and

sing for my dinner," laughed Amy, "but I will have you to sing for me while you stay. Isn't it sweet here at this hour? The gloaming lends a charm, doesn't it?"

"I don't know when I have been so happy," said Edna, unconsciously.

Amy looked up at her. The beautiful face was rosy in the firelight. Amy sighed.

"Why do you sigh?"

The question was asked before Edna was aware of it,

Amy took her hand, and pressed it against her cheek with an inexpressible touch of love, as she said:

"I wonder is there any human being who is perfectly happy? If it isn't one thing it is another. Isn't that the way they put it?" asked Amy, with a laugh, as Kate Gordon came in.

Next evening the drawing-room was lighted earlier than usual, and Edna supposed, as she passed on to the music-room to meet Amy, that the lighting up was on account of the arrival of the afternoon. There was an arrival, she was sure, by the little commotion she had heard, and she believed Kate's intended had come.

Happy Kate! thought Edna. Oh, the joy of the meeting of hearts that truly love!

Amy was not at the piano, where Edna expected to find her. Perhaps she would not "sing for her dinner" to-night on account of Sir Robert's presence. Edna seated herself at the piano. The room was darker, the fire having burned low. Edna preferred it to a brighter light. The soothing influence of the gloaming was again upon her. It brought back the memories of other days with an irresistible force. Her hands swept softly over the keys, and to a low accompaniment she sung:

"Remind me not, remind me not,
Of those beloved, those vanished hours,
When all my soul was given to thee;
Hours that may never be forgot,
Till time unnerves our vital powers
And thou and I shall cease to be.

"I dreamt last night our love returned,
And sooth to say, that very dream
Was sweeter in its fantasy
Than if for other hearts I burned,
For eyes that ne'er like thine could beam
In rapture's wild reality,

“Then tell me not, remind me not,
Of hours which, though forever gone,
Can still a pleasing dream restore,
Till thou and I shall be forgot,
And senseless as the moldering stone
Which tells that we shall be no more.”

The sound of her voice has not died away when a figure rises from a sofa in the corner, crosses the room and stands beside her.

For a moment Edna thinks it is Amy, but she has no sooner discovered it is the figure of a man than he has her hand in his. She starts, and he says:

“Have I frightened you, Amy? I must have been asleep when you came in. Your song awakened me, but for a time I was not sure I was not dreaming. You stirred up strange memories. I believe I’m dreaming yet.”

Edna wanted to wrench her hand from his, but could not. She had no power to speak, for the voice was familiar, and the hand that clasped hers was Vere Gordon’s.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONFESSION.

EDNA was very much Amy’s figure, and as her back was to the dying firelight, the man who had been aroused from his slumber distinguished no difference.

“Sing it again, Amy,” he said, with passion and entreaty. “Let me realize that the words were sung by you. I seem in a dream—a dream. I thought it was a voice from the past whose remembrance—— Oh, Amy, cousin, you have stirred up infinite pain, and the only touch of infinite pleasure I ever knew. Why should I confess this to you? Why should we all come to you with our trouble? What has come over me?”

He dropped her hand as he asked the last question, and passed his own hand over his brow, as if to clear away a mist.

Edna sunk on the piano-stool. She could not restrain the impulse that came over her. She would give the world to know whether Amy had won his heart. What right had she to this knowledge? She did not stop to answer that question. He had uttered words that made

her pulses throb, and sent her blood coursing like fire. At this moment her very life seemed to hang on knowing whether he loved her still.

She ran over the accompaniment of the song or rather made an attempt to do so, for the purpose of more effectually drowning her voice, as she said, scarcely above her breath:

"Then you have not recovered from your disappointment—you love her still?"

The words were uttered, and the moment's pause was of an intensity that made Edna count her heart-beats.

"Recovered from it!" he said, in a suppressed voice. "I shall never recover from it until, as your song says, 'she and I shall cease to be.' Ah, my dear cousin, I have won the name of a brave man, when, in reality, I have been a coward. I was not strong enough to endure life without her love, and I went out under the burning sun of India to throw that life away. A man can do intrepid deeds when he wants to get rid of his life; then the world applauds, and his countrymen give him a laurel wreath; while the man who valued his life and lost it for his country, lies untalked of in his unknown grave. Recovered from it! Oh, if I could tell you how often I tried to make myself believe I had. How I said, over and over again, Let the dead past bury its dead. I shall do service for my country, for the sake of my country. Why should I try to throw away my life? I shall win fame, and live to be proud of it. These resolutions would last until I would start up from my slumbers in the night, awakened by that voice I thought I heard when I started up a few minutes ago. It would come in the most unexpected way, and disturb the active duties of noonday, or the slumber of midnight, and make me once more its slave. It is no use—I might as well give up the fight. I cannot forget her—I cannot escape from the bondage of this hopeless love. Amy," and he lays his hand on her shoulder, but there are footsteps in the hall and a light appears.

For an instant, Edna's heart stands still. It is a servant to light up, and she will be discovered. There is but one way of saving herself, and she avails herself of it. She jumps up and rushes from the room without a word,

Buttons came in with a little torch. If he saw the gentleman at the piano, he did not reveal that fact by word or look; but the gentleman, who was something more than astonished at, as he thought, Amy's conduct, felt confused and guilty, and sat down to the piano, and made an attempt to play, to avoid Buttons.

"Well," he said to himself, as Buttons made his exit, "I wonder what I said? I don't half know; I was carried away by my feelings—I shouldn't have told her! Perhaps I made her feel badly, but that is no reason why she should run away without a word. Maybe——"

We don't know where his speculations would have carried him, were he not interrupted by a merry voice saying:

"Are you all alone? Oh, why didn't I know that sooner!"

He looked up, and saw Amy's handsome, laughing face in the doorway.

The tone of her voice, and her appearance there, gave him something more than a surprise. He couldn't account for it, but he felt uncomfortable.

"I have been all alone since you left me," he said, looking at her as if he half expected some sort of a contradiction.

"Alone for the last two hours!" she said.

The uncomfortable feeling grew upon him.

"For the last two minutes, you mean. Why did you run away?"

"Run away! When? I heard some delightful music before I came down-stairs, and I thought if you were here you were being entertained delightfully. What do you mean by saying I ran away?"

Her cousin's face blanched, and his voice was hollow, as he said:

"Amy, no nonsense; weren't you here a few minutes ago?"

"Why, no!" and Amy laughed merrily.

"You were not singing——"

"Oh, what a compliment you pay me. It was Mrs. Tremaine. Hasn't she a beautiful voice?"

"Mrs. Tremaine!"

It was all he said, but his face wore a look of white horror that made Amy, not understanding it, laugh, as

she walked over, and laying her hand on his shoulder, said:

“How came you to make the mistake?”

“It was dark here——”

He spoke in the hallowest of voices, and could not finish what he wanted to say.

“Well, what did you say? What did you do? You never said anything to me that was not the essence of cousinliness. Surely, you made no departure from the well-worn groove?” said Amy, with a laugh that had in it a touch of sadness. “You did not take it into your head to make love to me? You didn’t make any terrible confession?”

“Yes, I did make a terrible——”

He paused abruptly, threw Amy’s hand from his shoulder, and walked the floor excitedly. For some moments he seemed to forget Amy.

“I made a terrible mistake,” he said, at last, turning to Amy.

“It could have been nothing terrible, my dear Gordon, if you mistook Mrs. Tremaine for me, as you say,” said Amy, who had grown very serious while she looked at him.

He took a few turns on the floor before he answered. He tried his utmost for self-control, and partly succeeded in gaining it, when he turned to Amy again and held out his hand to her.

“You are quite right, Amy. Nothing so terrible could have happened, but thinking it was you, I was led to make remarks. I—I believe it was a sort of confession. What a fool a man can make of himself when he has a loving, confiding little cousin! I am sure I made a fool of myself, but it is all right now; and you won’t refer to it—not to any one, and above all not to Mrs. Tremaine. I would feel very uncomfortable if I thought you would. Give me your hand that you won’t, Amy.”

“Of course I won’t refer to it if you do not wish me to,” said Amy, sympathizingly, for she thought she began to see her cousin was afraid he would be laughed at.

“To no one, Amy,” he said, still holding her hand, as if it were an affair of life or death.

“I’ll never mention it without your permission, though I think it is a shame to lose the fun.”

“Fun!”

He dropped her hand and turned away in disgust, with evidently some indignation added, for there was a flash in his eyes as he said:

“Yes, you see what a coward I am. The fun would be at my expense, and I am bound to avoid it. Now, if it were Mrs.—— What did you say the lady’s name is?”

“Mrs. Tremaine. And wait-until you see her at dinner.”

The gentleman leaned his elbow on the mantel, and looked savagely at the pattern on the carpet, as if he were studying it. His expression of determination deepened.

“Shall I stay for dinner?” he said, and the manner in which he looked made one think he expected the vines on the carpet to answer him.

“What a question!” Amy cried. “You are not going to let Mrs. Tremaine frighten you away? Why, you will make me believe something dreadful has happened!”

“Oh, it was nothing dreadful—quite an every-day occurrence, I assure you,” and he laughed sarcastically. “I am making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Of course, I am not going to let Mrs. Tremaine frighten me away. I believe it’s my duty to meet her now. I’d like to see what she looks like in broad daylight—rather, under the gaslight.”

“Gordon, you will find her charming. And I am sure, whatever has happened, she will take no advantage.”

“Oh, please don’t mention that! After what has happened, I know the lady would take no mean advantage,” he said, with increasing sarcasm. “But come, tell me all about her—a new acquaintance, is she not?”

“Yes,” Amy said, “and just the loveliest friend we have ever made,” and she ran on in an ecstatic way, telling how she became acquainted with Edna, and dwelling on her beauty and manners with infinite delight.

“Is Mr. Marcus Tremaine here?” said Gordon, when Amy paused.

“No; he is in London for a few days. When he comes back, I fear they are going away.”

“Where?” asked her cousin, quickly.

“Back to New York,” said Amy; and if Gordon

wished to ask any more questions, he was prevented by Kate coming in.

The ladies were dressed for dinner, and he hastily excused himself, saying he had slept the hour away.

He threw himself in a chair when he reached his room, and forgot all about his dress. His thoughts were on his confession.

“I wish my tongue had lost its power before I spoke those words to her. Oh, Heaven! what cool heartlessness! What brazen effrontery to sit there and draw that secret from me! To think that I have wasted my thoughts on such a *thing*!” He started up in a rage. “I believe I could strangle her on the spot if she were before me. I ought to kill her for what she has made me suffer. And she knows now—she knows what I have suffered for her. What a triumph for her little soul! Shall I leave this house, and not meet her again? No; that would be all the more glory for her. I *will* see her again. She shall not return to America triumphant. I will go down and meet her as if that terrible confession were never made, as if we never met before, unless she choose to reveal that fact. She shall yet see that I am not her slave. Her husband isn’t here. That is a relief! Oh, this virtuous wife!” he cried, in derision, as he threw off his coat. “How will she look in my face after the work of this evening? Bah! what does she care? She has a heart of stone. She has never known a feeling of true love, and yet her song”—face and voice lost their rage—“her song, her voice, how sad they were—

“Remind me not, remind me not
Of those beloved, those vanished hours,
When all my soul was given to thee;
Hours that may never be forgot,
Till time unnerves our vital powers,
And thou and I shall cease to be.”

He laughed derisively with the last line, and repeated:

“When all my soul was given to thee.”

“Yes, she gave me her soul one day, and married Marcus Tremaine the next. Her sentiment sounds well with a piano accompaniment. Strange that a little art can make a heart of stone affect us like a soul. I’ll go down and see how her art will stand the test of the gaslight.”

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE STORM.

GORDON was full of derision as he came down-stairs. He had all his contempt and sneers well pigeon-holed in his mind. He persuaded himself that he was very cool and collected; yet his heart was beating violently when he entered the drawing-room.

There were but two ladies in the drawing-room, Kate and Amy, and a gentleman—Sir Robert Conway, Kate's intended. A tall, handsome young man, whose dark hair and eyes, and altogether bright, dark complexion proclaimed his Celtic origin.

"Ah, Gordon!" cried Sir Robert, "we are doomed to disappointment. 'Pon my honor, you look disappointed already!" laughed Sir Robert.

Gordon did look disappointed. He did not see Edna, and in spite of his fine calmness, was just a little upset, as he thought, but the truth was, his violently beating heart seemed to stand still, and a chill crept over him.

Amy looked at him, and a little wrinkle appeared over her nose. She was very much perplexed over her cousin's state.

"I anticipate what you are going to say," said Gordon, trying to laugh. "We are not to see the ladies' new friend. This perfectly beautiful young Mrs. Tremaine, who was to have run the gauntlet of our criticism."

"Exactly," said Sir Robert. "I think it is cruel to raise one's expectations so high, only to set them down in the depths of despair."

"Now, Robert, you know you are exaggerating," said Kate to her future lord. "We haven't talked in that strain."

"You haven't, Miss Gordon," laughed Gordon, trying his best to make light of the matter, "but you should have heard Amy."

"Yes, I did talk, and I say, now, you don't know what you have missed," said Amy, smiling.

"And why have we missed it? What have we done?" said her cousin, trying to appear indifferent.

"Unfortunately, Mrs. Tremaine is too ill to appear at dinner," said Kate.

"That is the way with all great artists: at the last moment comes the announcement to the waiting admirers, 'Cannot possibly appear on account of sudden indisposition,'" and Sir Robert laughed and begged the ladies' pardon, but there was grim truth on Gordon's face as he muttered:

"The case in a nutshell, Bob."

They went in to dinner, and Mrs. Tremaine was not mentioned again until Kate said:

"We thought of taking Mrs. Tremaine to the Rocks to-morrow. She will be going away shortly, and we would like to show her some of our geographical wonders. I believe the Rocks is the feature of this wonderful county. Can we depend upon you for escorts, gentlemen? But don't let us interfere with your plans. You know we *can* go without you," said Kate, with an independent shake of her head.

"Well, we don't know whether you can or not," smiled Sir Robert. "I am not so sure you can paddle your own canoe."

"Oh, we have been practicing," said Amy, "and we are experts with an oar. We'll pull a race with you any time."

"Shall we take that challenge, Gordon?" said Sir Robert.

Gordon was thoughtful while they were talking, though he tried to appear not to be so. If Edna would not meet him to-night, she would be less likely to do it to-morrow. He believed her indisposition was a pretense to avoid him. If he were of the party to-morrow she would not go. He was determined by fair play or false to see her again.

"Once more," he said to himself—"just once more, and then——"

His thought stopped there. Once more—and who could tell what then?

"I can't go to-morrow," he said. "I find I shall have to run up to London early in the morning, and I may not get home until evening; but there is nothing to prevent you going, Bob."

"No," said Bob, with a sigh; "since you leave me to myself here, there is nothing to prevent my going."

"Oh, thank you for thinking we are preferable to the solitude of your own company," said Kate.

Next morning Amy went into Edna's room very early.

"Are you better to-day, dear?" asked Amy, affectionately.

"No," said Edna, pitifully. "I was thinking I had better go home this morning. I am afraid I may be quite sick."

"There is not the least danger," cried Amy, somehow having an intuition that what she was about to say would make Edna well. "If you are well enough to drive, you are well enough to go with us to the Rocks."

"No, no!" cried Edna in alarm, but Amy went on without noticing the interruption.

"It is a most delightful spot—an island almost in the center of that great lake, a little to the north of the Nest. Maybe you have noticed it. 'Pon my word it's a health-restoring spot—Kate told me to tell you so, and, ah, so romantic! Sir Robert is going to take us. It is too bad my cousin Gordon cannot go, but he has an engagement in London. He has already started, and will be gone all day."

Edna drew a fluttering breath of relief. That breath seemed to give her new strength, for she was certainly well with the next breath, which said:

"I suppose the jaunt would make me feel quite well again."

"Just try it!" cried Amy. "You will go, won't you?"

After very little hesitation, Edna said she would, and just an hour later the little party started.

Without a spark of jealousy Kate watched the enchanting impression Edna made on Sir Robert, as they drove over to the lake along the banks of the little winding river—an outlet of the lake.

The distance by this winding route was some six miles, but they might have cut half the distance, only they wanted to show Edna the surrounding country.

It was early March, but the day was as perfect at the beginning as if it were the month of May.

"How beautiful and calm it is," said Edna, as they reached the lake.

"Ah, but these are treacherous waters," said Kate. "They turn black, like the Rocks yonder, when they

are roused, then boil white as they are lashed by the storm. We were caught in a storm here once. That is, Robert and I were. Thank Heaven, Amy was not with us! Do you remember it, Robert?" said Kate, as they stepped into the boat.

"Do I remember it?" said Sir Robert. "As if I could ever forget it. But don't be alarmed, ladies," he said, gayly, as he took the oars. "I'll never be caught in a storm here again. We will take to our boat if I see but a passing cloud."

"It's a threatening-looking mass," said Edna, looking at the island about a mile and a half away."

"It doesn't look very inviting from this side," said Kate; "but wait until you are there. See, we are not far from the Nest," said Kate, pointing to Edna's home, which could be seen plainly.

"Oh, I did not think it was so near," said Edna. "In the view from the house the water, strange to say, looks a long distance off."

The island was, indeed, a surprise to Edna. You climb the rocks, and the sight is enchanting this morning in early spring. Nature scattered her beauty with a lavish hand in spots and nooks and views. Green met the eye on every side, and there were hill and dell and ramble, and cave and cataract and bower.

"And nobody lives here!" cried Edna, letting her eye rove round from her high point of view in search of a dwelling.

"And nobody lives here," repeated Amy, with a laugh. "It is all ours, now that we are here."

The morning was gone before they knew it. They had their luncheon and rested, and again set out for the purpose of exploring. This time they wandered away from each other; Edna was with Sir Robert, but somehow she unconsciously lost him.

It was about two o'clock, and Sir Robert was startled by the sun going under a cloud.

"I don't like that," he said to himself, and the words were scarcely spoken when it grew darker. Sir Robert was not a coward; but he cried out in a startled voice: "Kate! Amy!"

"What's the matter?"

The voice that answered him was not Kate's or Amy's.

He heard the dip of oars, and the next moment Gordon was climbing up the rocks.

"Thank Heaven, you have come," cried Sir Robert. "We must get away at once. We are going to have a storm. Ah! here's Kate! where is Amy?"

Kate came up white and frightened, to be very much surprised at Gordon's sudden appearance.

"Here is Amy," said Kate, pointing to Amy, who was hurrying after her, "but where is Mrs. Tremaine?"

"There she is—away off at the other end of the island. I believe she knows we want her; she is coming. Gordon, you take Kate and Amy off at once, and I'll go for Mrs. Tremaine and follow in your boat."

"Allow me to do that," said Gordon, starting off in Edna's direction as he spoke. "Go at once," he called back. "Have no fear of me—you know I'm a good sailor!" and Sir Robert followed his advice.

Edna was walking rapidly to join her companions, when she saw a man hurrying toward her. She thought it was Sir Robert until she was within a few feet of him. She did not discover her mistake until she addressed him:

"Are you going back now?" she said.

"I don't know," answered the man.

The voice was husky, but she recognized it, and staggered back.

They looked into each other's eyes. His fairly gleamed.

"I don't know whether I ought to take you back," he said, stepping forward and grasping her by the arm. "I think, after last evening, I ought to sink our boat and drown the pair of us."

She did not speak. Her face was ashen, and his grasp on her arm did not prevent her from sinking at his feet.

CHAPTER XXI.

“NEVER CAN THIS THING END, AND THAT BE.”

“If you loved me ever so little,
I could bear the bonds that gall;
I could dream the bonds were brittle—
You do not love me at all.

“If I could but know, after all,
I might cease to hunger and ache;
Though your heart were ever so small,
If it were not a stone or a snake.”

“DON’T grow weak—don’t faint—it won’t save you,” he said, in a fierce, hot breath, as he grasped her arm tighter. “If I must stay here until morning, you shall hear what I have to say; then you may faint—then you may die. Under the cover of darkness last evening you cheated me; you stole my secret from me. You triumphed in the act, for you found out all you wished to know, while you still kept your word. Oh! what a loathing subterfuge! None but a soul as small as yours could stoop to it. And *I* have loved a thing so vile!”

He flung her arm from his grasp in the intensity of his disgust. She cowered, and her head lowered until her chin rested on her bosom, and his torrent of mad words ran on.

“You have kept your word. You wrote me you never wanted to see the face of a villain again, but when darkness hid the face of that villain from you no scruples stood in the way of your ascertaining whether the villain loved you still. I told you I loved you, didn’t I? Look at me!”

He bent over her, raised her chin on his finger-tips, and looked in her face. “I want to tell you, now that we are face to face in the light of day, how I despise you, though I have not conquered my unfortunate passion for you, for, just as surely as I say the words, a man always despises the thing that makes him despise himself. And I despise myself—oh, God! how I despise myself for having loved *her!*”

He threw up his arms to the black, rolling clouds, with that last sentence. For the moment he seemed to forget the woman at his feet. In the bitterness of his despair it was an actual confession to the Divine Being he called upon.

She spoke, and her words brought him back. How strangely her voice sounded. The dreariness and wail of the rising elements seemed to mix with the words. He would not be sure that sound came from her lips, only he was looking down in her face—and the face might be that of a dead woman.

“You are right—you should despise me, and despise yourself for ever having given me a thought. You cannot leave here and say you forced me to look in your face. I want to look in your face so that you will believe I want to take back those words I wrote to you. Oh, hasty cruel words, that could be penned only by one who had little faith! I want to tell you I have learned why you left me that night, and why you wrote me that letter. I know all—let us have no useless words. It is too late for words now. I had little faith indeed. I wronged you in thought. I am the thing you called me, unworthy such love as yours. Oh! if it were not for the words you have spoken, I might hope for—I might dare ask—your pity—your forgiveness!”

There was no rising of her voice in appeal. Its dreary monotone died away, and the angry elements filled his ears in its stead.

He looked at her in doubt. Did she feel the words she uttered? Was her confession only to turn his anger from her? She was all he thought her, she said, but still she wanted his pity, his forgiveness—his love to feed her vanity. He would give the world this moment, were it his, to prove his thoughts were wrong. Only to know that her heart was not all stone; only to know that this woman who crept into his life and wound herself about his heart-strings was not all snake; only to know that she could give him a heart-throb, and it would blot out the misery of the past, and make the future worth the living.

“Pity!” he said. “You talk of pity! What pity had you for me? But what matter about me? Had you any pity for yourself? Never mind about your little faith in me—were you true to yourself? Listen. These are the words you said to me, not forty-eight hours before your marriage: ‘The day I consent to be Marcus Tremaine’s wife will be the day I have learned to love him.’ Did you keep your vow?”

There was a rush of color to her face, as if she had

been touched with fire. If she obeyed her impulse, she would have thrown her arms about his knees and clasped them, and she would have shouted in a voice louder than the gale:

“No, no, no!”

But a strength that no human has from himself came to her. She knew if that little word passed her lips she was lost.

“Answer—yes or no,” he said, with intense eagerness. “Were you true to yourself when you married Marcus Tremaine?”

“You have no right to ask me that question.”

“No right,” he said, and he fell on his knees beside her and caught her hand. “Think of the promise you once gave me—of my suffering—my degradation—and say I have no right. Two days after you promised to be my wife you married another. That was base treachery, cold-blooded revenge——”

“Yes, it was all that,” she said, quickly.

His heart bounded, as he cried:

“Yes, it was for revenge—not because you learned to love that brute. You did not cease to love me?”

He knew after that that was a mad question, but people do mad things when life's happiness is at stake.

Edna wished the angry water breaking on the rocks would rise and swallow her. That would indeed be preferable to the fate that awaited her. She thought of her husband, then asked herself why she should think of him. Had he not betrayed her? Why should she be true to him? Why should the man seeking her love be true to the guilty creature he was bound to by the law? The love of her life had come back to her—why should she cast it from her, knowing what she did of her husband and this man's wife? The heavy banking clouds seemed to lower upon her. Her head swam. She raised her arms to him.

“—— Alas! would she trust

To that maxim of virtue made ashes and dust,

That the fault of the husband can cancel the wife's?”

“Edna!” and he opened his arms for her.

His cry brought her to her senses. She was a wife, and she would not trust to the “maxim made ashes and dust.” She knew that if she gave way one jot to her feel-

ings she could not save herself. There was nothing for her to do but let this man she loved think the worst of her. She sprung up to put this thought into action while she had the strength.

"You forget I am Marcus Tremaine's wife," she said, the sudden resolution giving her color and force.

This was indeed unexpected. Gordon rose slowly, and looked at her as if he could scarcely credit his senses.

"What you speak of happened two years ago. A woman can forget a great deal in that time. I have often regretted having misjudged you—that was all. Will you be kind enough to leave me now? I don't think this interview is pleasant, to say the least, for either of us."

He had sounded her heart, and that was his answer.

He looked at her for some moments, as if trying to make her out. He saw now that she had grown taller and more beautiful in two years. But what manner of girl was she? Her heart was a stone or a snake.

There was neither fierceness nor anger, nor wild entreaty, in his face or actions now.

"It is not necessary to prolong the interview, Mrs. Tremaine, since I have learned all I wished to know. I promised your friends to see you safely home. We had better start at once."

There was no murder in his words or his heart now. He started to walk, but seeing she did not follow him, he turned and said:

"You have nothing to fear, Mrs. Tremaine—mine were the ravings of a madman when I came to you. You may trust yourself to me. I'll keep my promise to Sir Robert."

She did not move and he stepped back, took her hand, and drew it through his arm, and led her to where the boat lay.

She walked at his side like a woman in a dream. Not a word was spoken. As he placed her in the boat, large raindrops began to fall. He looked around him. Tiny white-caps, the forerunners of the angry, boiling whirlpools that would soon be here, appeared upon the water. Gordon could scarcely see the opposite shore, but he knew the short-cut, and believed he could make it before the storm burst in all its fury.

He set to work with the earnestness and vigor of one

who was bound to master all obstacles, and he made his voyage, and landed his boat safely just as the rain came down in torrents.

Two men watched the approach of the boat. One a gentleman in his dress, the other a laborer. They were unknown to each other. They had sought the shelter of a shed, and the gentleman had been asking questions about the approaching boat, and seemed deeply interested. He went out of sight, however, as the boat neared the land, and the workingman started off on a run to meet it.

"I've been over to the Nest for a carriage to take you and the lady to Gordon Court. Here it comes now," said the man to Gordon, as a carriage came into view and was rattling toward them at full speed. "Sir Robert took the ladies home at once, as their carriage was open and he feared they would be drenched. He made me go to the Nest, as it was so near, and order the closed carriage for you."

"Thank you," said Gordon, as Tremaine's coachman drew rein before them. He opened the carriage-door for Edna, whose clothes were already dripping.

He did not speak to her, and she did not look at him as she entered the carriage, saying:

"I want to be driven home; I shall send my excuses to Miss Gordon for not returning to the Court."

"I beg of you not to leave the Court on my account, for I leave it in an hour or two."

"I would rather not go back. I fear I will take cold after this wetting. Will you be kind enough to explain my drenched condition to Miss Gordon, and say to her I thought it best to go home, as it was so near?"

She controlled her voice admirably as she said this, but it fluttered and hesitated as she concluded with:

"If you will drive to the Nest first——"

"Thank you, we will part here; but, before we part, let me tell you that our interview to-day has cured me of my folly. The unfortunate passion is dead at last, and the only feeling that remains is the loathing of myself for ever having had it."

He closed the carriage-door with the last word. There was no farewell. She heard him say to the driver:

"To the Nest."

"Vere, Vere! come back to me!" she cried, but too late.

The horse had started, and she caught one glimpse of the tall, manly form stalking off through the torrent, and the next moment he was lost to her sight, perhaps forever.

When the carriage arrived at the Nest, Mrs. Tremaine was found in an insensible condition.

She had, indeed, passed through the agony of death itself, but she had conquered. She had forged her own chains. She was Marcus Tremaine's wife, and the man she loved was Lady Landimere's husband, and never could this thing end and the thing they wished be.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE VERGE OF EXPOSURE.

HE closed the carriage-door, walked away, and did not turn to look at it again. He did not seek the shelter of the shed, he did not seem to see it, nor to know the rain was falling in torrents. The shortest cut to the Court was almost two miles. He took it, perhaps, by chance, for he did not appear to be conscious he was choosing his way.

What cared he for the clash of the elements, the blinding rain? He stalked on, intent on the more terrible storm that raged within.

The gentleman who retreated out of sight when the boat touched the shore stepped from under the shed after he had seen Lord Landimere pass. He looked after him now, and saw him rushing through the rain.

"It's strange," muttered the gentleman, and his looks, as well as his words, told he was sorely perplexed. "Not an hour ago she told me he had not returned. I'll follow him. I have as much at stake as he has, and I can stand the rain if he can."

He had no umbrella—nothing to protect him; but he started in pursuit, determined to find out Landimere's destination.

"I believe he is going to Gordon Court; if he is, his going to London was a ruse. Who knows—they may be fairly trapped this time."

In less than half an hour he had the satisfaction of

seeing Lord Landimere enter Gordon Court; but for that satisfaction he paid dearly. He was indeed a pitiable-looking object. He was drenched through. The water was dripping from his hat, hair, face, clothing, and it was nearly six miles to Landimere Hall. That was the point he wished to reach next—reach at all hazards. But would he present himself at Landimere Hall in such a condition, not to speak of the state he would be in from the additional exposure?

What does a man think of external appearances when going through the inward ecstasies of having achieved a tremendous success? Such was this gentleman's mental exhilaration, that his only thought was to reach Landimere Hall as he turned his face from Gordon Court and walked briskly, in spite of his heavy garments, along the road.

"My Lord Landimere will have to get up early in the morning if he wants to get ahead of me. I never played a game in my life that I didn't win, and I am sure I won't be left this time."

He forgot that every rule had its set of exceptions. He became impatient over the distance between him and Landimere Hall, but he took courage in the thought that he had nothing to fear. Lord Landimere was safely housed at the Court, hiding there, in fact—there was no danger of his putting in an appearance at the Hall.

Not only was he encouraged by this thought, but a moment later fortune favored him—he heard the rattle of wheels that the storm had drowned until they were near him. He turned and saw a covered wagon.

The driver, who might be a farmer, saw the gentleman's plight, and instantly said:

"I have room for you here, sir, if you have any distance to go."

"Ah, thanks, my friend; I have been caught in the storm, and I want to reach Landimere Hall as quickly as possible. If you are not going in that direction I will make it worth your while to take me there."

"I am going to the station near there, sir."

The man went very little out of his way in setting the gentleman down at Landimere Hall; but when he turned his horse's head to the station and looked at the bank-note in his hand, he said:

"I *thought* he was an American—them fellows is always lavish."

"Say to Lady Landimere that I have been caught in the storm, and have come in to claim shelter," was the message, in a smiling manner, the gentleman sent Lady Landimere.

Her ladyship came down-stairs quickly. She was a little startled at the message—she was more startled when she saw the gentleman's condition.

"Why, Marcus, something must have happened, to bring you back in all this storm!"

"Yes, something has happened. Fortune smiled upon me in sending me down from London to-day. You know I told you I did not think of coming until to-morrow."

"Yes, yes; what has happened?"

"Didn't you tell me you received a letter from Lord Landimere saying he might be here in a few days?"

"Yes—why?"

"Well, he knows how to manage his London letters admirably. It is the Paris affair over again."

"What do you mean?" said her ladyship, excitedly.

"Well, after I left here, I arrived at the Nest in the nick of time. I was in the stable when the order came to send a close carriage at once down to the lake for Mrs. Tremaine, as she had gone with a pleasure-party from Gordon Court to the Rocks, where they were caught in the storm. Then, on asking a question, I heard that Mrs. Tremaine had been at Gordon Court for two days. I became curious at once—something more than curious. I had what is called a presentiment, though I don't believe in such things; anyway, something forced me to go to the lake. When I arrived there two ladies and a gentleman were driving away in an open carriage. They did not see me. I knew the ladies—Miss Gordon and Miss Dean—and I questioned the man who had run up to the Nest for the carriage, and he told me the gentleman was Sir Robert Conway——"

"Yes, yes—Kate's intended!" cried Lady Landimere.

"The man did not know me, and I questioned him. He said the party had been over on the island, and there were more to come, and if they did not get over quickly they would have to stay until the storm was

over. But just then a boat came in sight, and in it I discovered Mrs. Tremaine and your husband."

"Impossible!" cried her ladyship.

"Now don't let us have the Paris contradiction over again. I saw Lord Landimere and Mrs. Tremaine. They looked strange—badly frightened. I think Lord Landimere put Mrs. Tremaine in her carriage and sent her to the Nest, and he started off on a walk, and I followed him to Gordon Court, where he is now."

Her ladyship sat down for the first time. She looked white and quiet for a moment, then her eyes blazed and her frame quivered.

"If this is true, my turn has come. If your wife has been there for two days, he has been there, and that London correspondence is arranged for the purpose of deceiving me. I shall call at Gordon Court this evening. See, the storm is breaking. It will clear, and I shall go there and see whether he denies himself to me, or whether that sister of his says he is not there."

"Well, suppose they deny it—what then?"

"I want them to deny it, if what you say is true. You can prove you saw Lord Landimere—and your wife! Ah, I have it!" said the countess, excitedly. "Make your wife the witness against him. Go home at once, and before she can get any warning, make her admit she was with Lord Landimere to-day. If necessary, say you saw them, but do it in an uninterested way. Do not alarm her, or put her on her guard."

"And if we prove them guilty—for I believe we are about to do it—you will remember your promise? Once we are free, you will be my wife?"

He caught her hands as he spoke, and she raised herself on her toes and pressed her lips to his.

"Let that seal my promise," she said; "and now go, and don't fail in your work."

"And shall I call in the morning?"

"No, be at the turn of the lane as I am coming back this evening—about half-past nine. Be walking on the right. I'll see you, and have the coachman stop. In a few moments we can tell what has taken place."

Tremaine went home. He pretended not to notice his wife's wretched appearance, but since the day he married her he never saw her look as she did this evening.

"I am glad you have come back," she said.

"You didn't expect me to-day?" he tried to say indifferently.

"I wasn't sure when you would come," she answered.

"Ah, that is why she came home," he thought.

And she continued:

"I have been most of the time at Gordon Court."

"That was pleasant. Ah, by the way, I heard a pleasure-party from Gordon Court came near being wrecked to-day."

"Yes, I was one of the party. The storm caught us, and we had a rough voyage back. I got drenched, and came home instead of going back to the Court."

"Was it a large party?" he asked, carelessly.

"No, there were only five. Miss Gordon and her intended, Miss Dean, Lord Landimere and myself."

He turned so that he could see her face as he said:

"Landimere! I thought he was up in London?"

"He came to Gordon Court yesterday, if I am not mistaken."

She did not look at him as she spoke, but her voice was steady.

"Ah, that's it!" he said, indifferently, and he was about to leave the room, when she said:

"Have you completed the arrangements for us to go away?"

"I don't think you will have to stay here much longer," he said. "I'll know in a day or two, perhaps, when we can take our departure."

With these words he left the room, and a moment after he was saying to himself:

"I believe now all that eagerness to get away from here is put on. Oh, how I wish the hour were here that I could let her know she is not deceiving me!"

After the storm came a beautiful evening and a clear, moonlight night. Tremaine had hurried from the lane to the main road as Lady Landimere's carriage came rolling toward him.

"Stop a moment," said the countess to her coachman; "I believe that is Mr. Tremaine, and I wish to speak to him. Mr. Tremaine!" she called, as the carriage stopped, and that gentleman turned back—in great surprise, of

course—and stepped to the carriage door, where there was a hurried whisper.

“Edna admitted Lord Landimere was with the pleasure-party to-day. He arrived at Gordon Court yesterday.”

“She did?” said her ladyship; “and Kate Gordon, when I asked carelessly if Vere were at the Court, was quite surprised, and said she did not know he had returned from London. She said their only visitor was Sir Robert Conway. I let it go at that, and changed the conversation. I did not wish to let her know I suspected anything.”

“Now, then, you believe we have been deceived?”

“Yes,” she said, in an exultant whisper. “I have them in a tight place now. I must have to-night to think. There must be a meeting brought about. I must have yourself and Mrs. Tremaine confront Kate Gordon, and Lord Landimere too, if he can be found. Give me to-night to think. You will hear from me in the morning. I can trust my maid with a note to you, but you had better be on the lookout for her and get it yourself.”

Lady Landimere passed the greater part of her night in plotting for the morrow, but the morning came, and found her feverish with excitement, but without any definite plan. She feared taking the first step, as she did not wish it to be a misstep.

She was sitting with her brows knit, thinking over what word she would send Tremaine, when her maid came in and said:

“My lady, Lord Landimere has arrived.”

Her ladyship could not repress an exclamation as she thought:

“The difficulty is solved! Now, then, let us see what he will have to say for himself. He little dreams he is on the verge of exposure.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

HIS GUILT BROUGHT HOME TO HIM.

“How shall I begin? What shall I say to him?” said Lady Landimere to herself.

She trembled visibly. She felt that the supreme moment of her life had come. The desire of her life was

about to be gratified. The Gordons had their day—she would have hers now. They were sure they would prove something disgraceful against her some day and free themselves from her, but now she would let the haughty Kate see at whose door lay the disgrace. The world had taken part with the Gordons, now she would let the world see how wise it was. True, the world had its laugh at Vere Gordon, Earl of Landimere, and had called him a blind man. Well, to say the least, the world would never have a laugh at her eyesight.

On the threshold of such a triumph, was it any wonder her ladyship was nervous? She was afraid of herself, afraid of her weakness—it was a woman's weakness. She would talk; and one cannot always say the right thing when one talks much and fast.

“Now I must keep cool; I must not let my dreadful temper get the best of me,” she said to herself over and over again, yet when her husband's footstep sounded without, her heart thumped the louder.

When he came in he looked tired, but a careful observer would have noticed it was anxiety and not exhaustion from physical exertion. He threw himself, with an air of indifference, into a chair, as he said:

“How do you do, Hetty?”

She, too, tried to speak, and appear indifferent, as she said:

“I'm very well. Didn't you get back sooner than you expected?”

She could not control her trembling.

He noticed her agitation, and for a moment his weary air disappeared.

“Is there anything wrong?” he asked quickly. “Has anything happened to Bea? John told me she was out with her governess.”

“I believe she is, and there is nothing the matter with her that I know of.”

Lord Landimere's look of concern vanished, and the tired air returned as he leaned back in his chair. If his little daughter was well, there was nothing else connected with her ladyship or Landimere Hall that could concern him.

This very assumption that nothing else could happen in which he was interested, that he hadn't the slightest

fear of having been found out, made her ladyship's agitation take on a sort of bristling aspect.

"I beg pardon," he said. "I believe I am tired answering questions, or I am tired of everything under the sun—perhaps that will cover it better," and his lordship put his hand over his mouth to conceal a yawn.

"Lord Landimere, I think you ought to understand that there are some things I have a right to know," she said, struggling to keep cool.

"Spare me an argument," he said, with a wave of his hand that described his weariness, and in a most aggravatingly cool tone. "I grant you that every human being in existence is entitled *to know some things*, as you put it."

"Lord Landimere, I don't pretend to be a logician," and her hands twitched as she clasped them to restrain herself.

"That is well," he said, with an amused smile.

"Lord Landimere, I'll have you to know that I have rights——"

"Hetty, I admit at once that I never knew a woman who hadn't. I wonder what would be the consequence if I insisted on my rights——"

He paused, as if he were thinking the matter over.

She did not answer at once. Her rage—which she tried to swallow—almost choked her. When she caught her breath, she said:

"*Your* rights!"

"That's right—ridicule me the moment I mention them." And the smile came back, as if he took a delight in tormenting her.

"You do as you please!" she cried, unheeding his words.

"And you don't," he said, quietly.

This was too much for her ladyship. Tears of vexation stood in her eyes, as she said:

"I only asked you a civil question."

"I beg pardon—I couldn't have heard it; but pray be careful when you repeat it. A civil question often leads to a civil suit, which makes the parties to it anything but civil."

"You are quite right, for all your sarcasm," she cried, on the point of boiling over.

"Indeed, I intended no sarcasm. I was just giving a bit of good-natured advice."

She was certain now that he had tried to evade her, and having failed, was taking a defiant attitude.

"Oh, you know what is coming, and you think you can silence me with your daring effrontery."

"Daring effrontery! Isn't your language a trifle strong, Hetty?"

He spoke just as quietly, but there was a faint look of surprise on his face as he concluded with:

"It runs in my head that when you came down to the Hall you made some sort of promise of a reformation, trying to live in peace and happiness, and all that sort of thing, but it looks to me, my dear Lady Landimere, as if you were working up one of your regular tornadoes. Perhaps I am the discordant element. I'll retire——"

He rose with these words, but he did not finish his sentence, neither did he reach the door. Her ladyship was there before him, there with the spring of a tigress, and a tigress she looked as she planted herself against the door and faced him.

He looked at her a moment, then very coolly sat down again. This exhibition of her ladyship's temper was not new to him. He was a trifle whiter; otherwise, whether he knew what was coming or not, he seemed prepared for anything she might say.

"You shall stay here!" she cried.

"Yes, perhaps I had better for the present; but pray remember, Countess of Landimere, that your household has ears, and I am not deaf."

"What matter how I speak? They might as well hear it to-day as to-morrow. The whole world shall know it to-morrow. At last your hypocrisy shall be laid bare, my virtuous Lord Landimere."

He pricked up his ears and turned red. He had goaded her to fury, and once started, she lost all control of herself.

"Ah, no wonder you turn red—you know you are found out! You never knew anything wrong of me, but you made your insinuations, and threatened me and tortured me. I came down here because you insinuated that the world said ill-natured things about me, and in good faith I promised you that you could do with me as you pleased,

that I would be subject to your guidance, and I would remain here forever if you wished me to."

"Oh, Hetty!"

He leaned back, with a very weary air, as he spoke and rubbed his forehead. He was compelled to listen to her, but he made the blaze burn brighter by saying:

"Be merciful, and cut it short. What effect do you want to produce? You might as well tell me at once, for I am sure I will see it in a moment. I assure you, Hetty, there is no novelty about this thing."

The only change in his manner was that he ended with a sneer.

"Oh, you needn't sneer!" she cried. "There is no novelty in this thing—of course not! You have been deceiving me all along with your cant and your sneers, and I, poor fool, believed in you. I came down here and buried myself alive to please you, and for what? Well, thank Heaven, to find you out, and not only you, but your fine family, who have done their best to encourage you in your evil way, and have succeeded at last in separating us; your lovely sister, that paragon of high breeding and innocence, who is not above coming between husband and wife. Ah! I have found you all out! You thought yourself very cunning with your lying letters from London, pretending you were there, just as you wrote me when I was in Paris, and you yourself were in Paris at the same time. When I accused you of it I allowed you to persuade me I was wrong; but you cannot persuade me this time. All little systems have their day, and your little London arrangement has failed this time. I received a letter from you yesterday purporting to have been written in London the night before. It was, but not by you; rather, it was not sent by you from there, for at that hour, and for hours before it, you were at Gordon Court."

"That is a lie, and you know it."

He grew very red while she was talking, but he turned white and trembled as he contradicted her.

"It is the truth," she cried. "I had proof yesterday that you were there, and I went to the Court last night just to learn whether you would be denied to me; just to learn whether you had accessaries, and your

honorable sister *lied* to me. She said you were not there——”

“By heavens, she told you the truth, and don’t say again——”

“She *lied* to me. She told me the truth when she denied you were there then, for, of course, after your escapade yesterday, you took your departure—you were afraid of being found out; but she lied when she said you had not been there, or inferred as much when with such perfect innocence she declared she did not know you had returned from London.”

He started up when he asserted Kate had told the truth, but he sat down again, and he said in an unnaturally calm voice:

“What proof have you that I was at Gordon Court?”

“Mr. Tremaine saw you——”

“Tremaine again! Well, by Jove, this is getting interesting. Tremaine told you he saw me in Paris when I was in London. The man must be laboring under an illusion, or”—Lord Landimere looked as if he had been struck with a new idea—“perhaps he is in your service, playing the part of detective? I am sure he must be interested——”

“Without a doubt, he is interested in *you*, and with very good reason.”

He had fallen into his indifferent, aggravating manner again, and her only wish was to say the most damaging thing she could think. What matter what she said, since she could prove it true?

“Interested in me! Is he, indeed? Well, since he has seen fit to tell you this ghost story, and you are making such capital out of it, suppose we invite Tremaine here, and let him make this charge to my face?”

“Ah! but you will have to invite some one else here——”

“More witnesses against me!” and this time he laughed sarcastically.

“Yes, you shall have to ask *Mrs.* Tremaine here. She has admitted to her husband that you were with her to the Rocks yesterday. Now, then, perhaps you will still assert you were in London? And maybe you are not so surprised now that Mr. Tremaine is interested in you?”

He looked at her in blank astonishment.

It was her turn to triumph at last, and she smiled and showed her teeth most beautifully.

"What do you mean?"

He spoke and looked utterly helpless.

"I simply mean that you are found out, that you have been carrying on an intrigue with Mrs. Tremaine——"

"Woman, what are you saying?" and he started to his feet.

"None of that, Vere! You can't terrorize *me*! I mean just what I say. I prevented your marriage with that woman, but you love her yet. I did not tell you that I went to her in Philadelphia the night before we were married by the mayor. I thought I would wait my time to tell you, and my time has surely come. You have deceived me, you have been untrue to me, and Kate Gordon knows it, and what is more, Marcus Tremaine knows it. I told him recently what he had always been kept in ignorance of, that his wife was engaged to you, and yesterday he saw you coming from the island with her and followed you to Gordon Court."

He put his hand up to his head and sunk back in the chair, very much like a man who realized he had received a death-stroke. Horror had been creeping into his face while she was talking. He could not interrupt her, he dared not until he had heard every word she had to say. When she paused, he gave voice to his horror in two words, as he sunk back:

"Great God!"

She no longer stood rigidly by the door—she could afford to give way now. Her fury was all gone; and she stood smiling at her work. If she had any heart she could not help pitying him. He looked, indeed, like a man hopelessly crushed by the evidence of his crime.

"What have you to say for yourself?" She spoke very deliberately now. "You and your family have tried to fasten guilt upon me, but my Lord Landimere, the tables are turned; to-morrow the world will know me as a faithful but wronged wife, and your own family—your sweet sister, and sweeter cousin, who denied me to you last night, shall be compelled to testify in my behalf."

"Stop," he said, in a suppressed voice; "don't mention the women of my family again. Their names are too pure to come from a mouth so foul."

"That sounds well, my virtuous lord. Your only defense of them and yourself is to abuse me. Perhaps the courts of England will accept such a defense!"

It was now her turn to be mocking and sarcastic. He did not seem to heed her words. His knees supported his elbows, and his hands pressed his head, as if he were trying to think. She stood watching him, and waiting for him to speak. Presently he looked up at her and said:

"The night before you met me you went to Edna Forrest and told her you were Vere Gordon's wife?"

"Yes, I did. Hasn't she told you about it?"

"She has not. Perhaps you will be kind enough now to tell me what she said that night?"

"Oh, she took on dreadfully," and she told him all about it for the purpose of wringing his heart, which she succeeded in doing, for he covered his face and fairly groaned in anguish.

"And her husband did not know she was engaged to Vere Gordon until you told him?"

"No, she married out of pique, and she never breathed a word of it to him, nor did he suspect it until I told him."

"How did you come to tell him such a thing?" he asked, gaining control over himself, and looking at her steadily.

"I met him one evening in Paris, and he told me he had met you, and his wife had met you. I believed you were in London, but I saw at once you had reason for being in Paris unknown to me. You were with Mrs. Tremaine. I knew it, and I told her husband the whole story."

"And he has been watching me ever since?"

"He has been watching his wife. He ran up to London for a few days, came back and found his wife had been spending the time at Gordon Court with you—discovered it very nicely, just when he came home," and she told him how Tremaine saw him coming from the island with Edna and followed him to Gordon Court.

He looked appalled by the story, but his eyes rested on her as if he were taking her measure. When she stopped talking she became uncomfortable under his gaze, and in sheer bravado she said:

"Well, can I give you any further information?"

He rose, and, his eyes still on her, said:

"You fiend!"

"Thank you," she said, with a ringing laugh; "but you have discovered no missing link in the evidence."

"I have only this to say to you now. I deny ever having met Mr. or Mrs. Tremaine in Paris, or at Gordon Court, or at the Rocks, or anywhere else, since I left them in America, and I deny being in this neighborhood since I left for London nearly a month ago. Now, then, prove what I say isn't true."

And before her ladyship could answer he was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LORD LANDIMERE AT MRS. TREMAINE'S SERVICE."

THE countess was nothing daunted by her lord leaving the scene so suddenly. It was simply bravado, she thought, as she saw by his conduct that he knew his case was a hopeless one. Still, she thought he would bear watching, and she wondered what his next movement would be, and what hers ought to be.

She questioned her maid, and learned that he had retired to his own apartment. She stole to his door and listened. He was pacing up and down. She went back to listen three times, and each time she heard his tread.

An hour later she saw him depart on horseback. She watched the direction he took. She hadn't a doubt he was going to the Court. She knew, after what she had told him, he would not venture to the Nest.

Yet she must take every precaution. She had promised to communicate with Tremaine this morning, and he would be on the lookout and expecting it, so she at once dispatched her maid with the following note:

"He has come home, and denies flatly that he was at the Court yesterday, or that he has seen Mrs. T. since he left America. He has left the house—gone to Gordon Court, I presume. Keep a sharp lookout, and intercept any communication he may send Mrs. T. I think I shall take open proceedings against him at once. Though he denied everything, he was a perfect picture of guilt."

If Lord Landimere had been to the Court, he was there and back in an incredibly short space of time, and

he gave her ladyship a surprise by coming directly to her, and saying:

"Will you do me the honor to be ready to accompany me to the Nest at three o'clock? Since Mr. Tremaine has made certain statements about me, and Mrs. Tremaine has made admissions, I think it would be as well for them to repeat them in your presence to my face. I have already notified Mr. Tremaine we would call on him."

He did not wait for her reply. Why should he? Under the circumstances, there was but one thing she could do—comply with his request.

After receiving Lady Landimere's note, Tremaine was on the lookout for a communication from Lord Landimere to Edna, but, to his surprise, the communication came from that gentleman, not to Edna, but to himself. It read:

"Marcus Tremaine, Esq.:

"DEAR SIR,—You have made certain reports to my wife, and Mrs. Tremaine has stated she was in my company at the Rocks yesterday, the truth of which I deny *in toto*. I shall call with Lady Landimere at three for an explanation. Trusting the hour will be convenient for you, I am, very truly yours,

VERE GORDON LANDIMERE."

Tremaine's ruddy face turned white as he read this statement.

"By heavens, this is cool cheek! Well, my lord, you could not make a move that would better suit me."

He kept watch over his wife from that moment. He saw that no one called on her, and that she received no message of any kind.

Edna wondered why he kept near her so long. As three o'clock approached, he became nervous. He knew she would not receive Lady Landimere. He must manage to get to the drawing-room without her knowing whom she was to meet.

At three o'clock precisely there was an arrival, and he was on the landing to intercept the footman.

"Who is it?" he whispered, with a shake of his finger to impress silence.

"Miss Gordon and Miss Dean, and they asked if Lord

and Lady Landimere had arrived, as they were to meet them here."

Tremaine's heart gave a bound of relief. The whole family were to be brought in to testify, but he was not afraid of them, and the two ladies' coming first was very fortunate. He saw his way clear now, and he said to the footman:

"Wait until Lord and Lady Landimere arrive, then bring only Miss Gordon and Miss Dean's names to Mrs. Tremaine, just as you are doing now. Do not mention the Landimeres—do you understand?"

The footman understood perfectly, and he had scarcely returned to the lower hall when the Landimeres arrived.

"Now, then," Lord Landimere said, when he entered the drawing-room with his wife, "I will just step behind this *portiere*, and, Kate and Amy, whatever you hear, have nothing to say. Madam," he said, turning to his wife, "I will leave it to you to question Mrs. Tremaine as you please, but I must hear her accuse me of being at the Rocks with her yesterday."

"She cannot deny it in her husband's presence," said her ladyship, imperiously, and Kate and Amy looked at each other in growing astonishment.

They were invited here by Lord Landimere, but for what purpose they did not know.

Lord Landimere stepped behind the *portiere*. Her ladyship stepped to the window to gain control, and to conceal herself until Mrs. Tremaine had spoken to Kate and Amy.

A few moments later Edna came in, accompanied by her husband. Kate and Amy looked foolish. Edna, suspecting nothing, gave them a cordial greeting, and was about to seat herself near them, when a voice behind her said:

"Good-day, Mrs. Tremaine. I hope you will pardon this seeming intrusion."

"Lady Landimere!"

The name escaped Edna's lips before she was aware of it, as she drew back from her ladyship.

Had this woman the effrontery to force herself upon her under the protection of Kate and Amy? was the thought that flashed through Edna's mind. But the presence of Kate and Amy, much as Edna loved them,

could not influence her to receive this creature, and she stood upon her dignity at once.

"Madam," she said, in her clear, soft voice, "I did not expect to have such an honor thrust upon me."

Her ladyship posed instantly. She drew herself up as high as she possibly could get, her eyes flashed, and she was about to speak, when Tremaine stepped between them.

"Pardon me, Edna, I should have told you Lady Landimere was coming here to ask you a few questions."

Edna looked at him with cool scorn as she said:

"And you knew Lady Landimere was coming here?"

"I forgot to tell you."

Edna bowed in mocking acknowledgment of his kind intentions.

"You need not be afraid, Mrs. Tremaine, that I will trouble you with my presence any longer than to ask you a few questions which are of vital importance to me, and to my relatives here," said her ladyship.

The last clause claimed Edna's attention. She looked at Kate and Amy, but they looked bewildered.

"You have told your husband that Lord Landimere accompanied you to the Rocks yesterday?" said Lady Landimere, and she waited for Mrs. Tremaine's reply.

"My husband asked me of whom our party was made up," said Edna, quietly, "and with the rest I mentioned Lord Landimere's name."

Kate and Amy gave little exclamations of surprise, and her ladyship said, still more imperiously:

"And you still assert Lord Landimere was with that party yesterday?"

"Yes," Edna said, wonderingly, "he was with us."

Lady Landimere could not restrain her triumph.

"You hear, Miss Gordon and Miss Dean, and you denied him to me last night. *You didn't* know that he had returned from London," and her ladyship laughed mockingly, as she turned to the *portiere* and said: "Come forth, Lord Innocent—I think you have heard enough."

And a man stepped from behind the curtain and stood before Marcus Tremaine and his wife.

The sudden appearance of the man made them speechless for the moment, and in that moment Lord Landi-

mere was forgotten, for Marcus Tremaine stepped forward, holding out his hand and saying:

"Why, Edna, if I am not mistaken, this is our old acquaintance, Mr. Clifford. For Heaven's sake, old fellow, where did you come from?"

"One moment," said the gentleman, stepping back from Tremaine. "Let me introduce myself. I was Clifford when we met before: I am Lord Landimere to-day, at your service, Mrs. Tremaine," and he held out his hand to Edna.

She let him take her hand, but she could not speak, nor could any one else.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WAGES OF SIN.

THE statement Lord Landimere made in a few words must have produced a terrible shock. Even Amy and Kate, to whom the meaning of the words was unintelligible, knew that they conveyed something of awful importance, for the faces of Lady Landimere, Edna and Tremaine portrayed such strange emotions, while they stood speechless.

These three were shocked, dazed; for the time they were unable to grasp all that those few words meant.

"Mrs. Tremaine, I want to ask you a question before I—— Pardon me—I know the terrible revelation that has come to you, but won't you answer me before we have any further explanation? Where did you see me last?"

"In Philadelphia, but you—you——"

"One moment, Mrs. Tremaine," he said, clasping her hand more closely, as if to give her strength; "that was nearly two years and a half ago, was it not?"

"I think so," and Edna put her disengaged hand to her head.

"And, Mr. Tremaine, may I ask if you have seen me in that time? I believe you are my principal accuser?"

"I have not met *you* in that time, but you are not Lord Landimere! Lady Landimere, this man is not your husband!" cried Tremaine, becoming excited, and refusing to believe what was fast dawning upon him.

"Do you mean to say you haven't seen *him*?" said

Lady Landimere, pale and trembling, as she pointed tragically at his lordship.

Tremaine need ask no more questions. The exclamation was his answer. There was a moment's silence, then Lord Landimere said:

"Mrs. Tremaine, you have suffered a wrong, through me, that can never be righted in this world, and not only you, but the man who is my dearest friend on earth. That wrong was perpetrated when this woman"—and he indicated his wife by a contemptuous nod—"called on you one night in Philadelphia. She was not guilty of intentionally injuring you; if she had not been laboring under a terrible mistake she would have been doing you a service. To my everlasting shame, I shall have to acknowledge I married this woman——"

"Sir!" cried Lady Landimere.

"Madam," said her husband, "the Landimere pride is the cloak that has shielded you so long. I cast it aside here with the covering you have torn from poor human hearts. I repeat, I married this woman in good faith, but thought I was legally free from her before I went to America; I was mistaken. She followed me, learned that I was engaged to you, as she told me to-day for the first time, and she sought you out and told you that I was her husband. She told you the truth. Vere Gordon was her husband, but the man you loved was not Vere Gordon. He was Gordon Clifford—I was Richard Vere Gordon. We exchanged names before going to America for a purpose which I need not relate here. Mrs. Tremaine, you understand what I am saying?"

He asked the question in alarm, as Edna did not attempt a comment, and she was looking at him with an intensity that startled him.

Amy's arm circled her waist when Landimere had asked that question.

"Vere, you have kept Mrs. Tremaine standing all this time. Won't you be seated, dear?" said Amy, in a voice low with sadness.

"No—no," Edna said, in a voice as intense as her look, "let me stand—don't interrupt him—he has something more to tell. I want to hear it all—all!"

"Mrs. Tremaine," and Lord Landimere's voice trembled with emotion—his heart ached for her—"we should thank

God for this day, for it has saved you from suffering a still more grievous wrong through me. Your honor and mine have been plotted against, and if this woman was innocent of wronging you before, she is not innocent in plotting this still greater wrong, but she is not alone in her guilt. The two people of all people in this world who should have kept our honor untarnished have determined to bring ignominy upon us."

"Take care, Lord Landimere, what you say," cried Tremaine, who thought it was time to put in a defense. "Remember, I could not know that you misrepresented yourself to us at Cape May."

"Sir!" cried Landimere, haughtily, "your crime is the same, whether I am the man or not."

"Crime!" said Tremaine, first turning livid, as if that term frightened him, then glaring in a bullying manner at Landimere, he was about to speak again, when his lordship quietly interrupted him, saying:

"Yes, *crime!* and for that word I am prepared to answer you in another place and at a proper time. You have entered into a conspiracy with this woman against your wife's honor, which it was your first duty to protect. I don't know what your motive was, sir, but it seems to me that your incentive was the hope of convicting your wife. Do you suppose if I had acted the part of the cowardly spy, as you have, that woman would bear the name of Landimere to-day?" and he pointed his finger scornfully at Lady Landimere.

But all his scorn and wrath were powerless to rouse her ladyship's anger, violent as it habitually was. She saw her case was lost, and she had stepped beyond the pale of her lord's forgiveness. She looked beseechingly at Tremaine as her husband denounced her. Tremaine felt that he could afford to let Lord Landimere say no more. Every word that had been said struck terror to his heart. How dared Landimere talk to him in this manner? Did he suspect the relation that existed between him (Tremaine) and Lady Landimere? Impossible! thought Tremaine, and he at once assumed the indignant *role*.

"You will leave my house this instant, sir, or I shall have you——"

"I shall spare you that trouble, Mr. Tremaine. Any communication from you will find me at Gordon Court."

"Lord Landimere, stay—I have not yet spoken," said Edna, laying her hand on his arm.

She thought she was speaking loudly, yet her voice was only an intense whisper.

Tremaine sneered.

"Madam, it would be more becoming your part if you remained silent. You forget, rather you force me to remind you, that Lord Landimere and your former lover not being identical does not lessen your guilt."

"Guilt!" said Edna, as she touched the bell that was near her—"you accuse *me* of guilt?" and she turned from the bell and looked at him. He tried his best to assert the *role* of injured husband, but it melted beneath her gaze. And he looked the coward he was. "Marcus Tremaine, I have been a true wife to you; in your heart you know it, and were it not for this creature's fascination, you never would have thought otherwise."

It was a truth he could not summon courage to deny, but it roused Lady Landimere to a sense of impending danger.

"Mrs. Tremaine, be careful what you say. Don't dare say anything to implicate me in your trouble with your husband. If you do, you will be sorry. I shall not remain to be thus insulted."

"Madam, you have forced yourself upon me, and you shall stay and take the consequences," and Edna stepped to the door to speak to the maid, who was knocking in answer to her ring; then turning to Lady Landimere, but still keeping her position near the door, she continued: "I found you here, madam, the picture of triumph. Aided by the man who calls himself my husband and protector in planning a most diabolical crime, you came here to witness its completion"—here Tremaine attempted to interrupt her, but with a wave of her hand she silenced him—"to make me convict your husband and condemn myself from my own lips; but, Lady Landimere and Mr. Tremaine, you have been caught in the trap of your own setting. Lord Landimere, I owe a duty to you and to myself which I am bound to perform. My lord, your honor has been betrayed by the woman who this day tried to drag your name through the mire and exonerate herself, while she freed herself from you by placing the dishonor at your door—and for what reason? Ah! it is no

wonder, my lord, that you and your relatives look surprised; and you will look more surprised still when I tell you that this man, whom I have called husband for the last time, and the woman who had our ruin already prepared, are themselves guilty of breaking their marital faith; that an intrigue has been going on between them, Heaven only knows for how long, and it was at this woman's call from Paris that Mr. Tremaine crossed the Atlantic."

"It is false!" cried Lady Landimere, pale and trembling.

"It is a lie!" echoed Tremaine.

There was a knock, and Edna opened the door and took a box from the maid.

"I shall prove what I said," Edna continued, when she closed the door.

She touched a spring and the lid of the box flew open.

"Here, Lord Landimere, is some documentary evidence for you," and she put in his hand Lady Landimere's cablegram, and her letter to Tremaine after he reached Paris. As she did so, she said: "You will see the cablegram has Lady Landimere's initials, the letter her name."

This was too much for the conspirators. Lady Landimere sunk into a chair and burst into a fit of weeping, and declared it was false—all false—and she would prove it to his lordship's satisfaction, and she called on Mr. Tremaine to say that she could, but Tremaine heard nothing for the time—he could only see Lord Landimere reading those papers.

"Oh, this is terrible, Amy," said Kate. "Let us go; we have heard enough——"

"No," said Edna, sadly; "if you care anything for me, Miss Gordon, do not go. I have something more to say—something of vital importance to myself."

"Stay, Kate," said Lord Landimere, authoritatively. "Mrs. Tremaine has done me an everlasting service. We are hers to command."

His lordship's face was as white as death, but it was not from fear or terror. He felt his wrong so deeply that a deadly rage consumed him, and he had a struggle to listen calmly to Edna, who in a sad, sweet voice began her life on the night Lady Landimere called on

her in Philadelphia, and told her there, in the presence of her husband, the trial she had passed through, taking nothing from nor adding anything to her mental wretchedness, her temptations and triumph, though she knew of her husband's infidelity. Even Tremaine was touched when she told him she thought it her duty to win him, and when she was trying to do it he deceived her and brought her down to the vicinity of Landimere Hall. She told her story simply and briefly. Truth and the purity of her life sustained her. She strained for no effect, even when she concluded with:

"Lady Landimere, in the letter your husband now holds you said you would take great pleasure in calling on me. If you have not received all the pleasure you anticipated, you at least have received your deserts. Will you excuse me now?" She looked at Lord Landimere, Kate and Amy as she asked the question, bowed, and left the room.

"Come, Kate and Amy, this is no longer any place for you. As for you, sir, you may thank your lucky star we are in England. If we were in France I might be foolish enough to descend to a duel with you. As it is, I will let the just law of my country avenge my wrongs."

He passed out with Kate and Amy. He did not look at his wife, and the guilty man and woman were left alone.

What was left for them to do? But one thing, they thought, and they did it.

That night Marcus Tremaine eloped for the second time.

And this time it was with another man's wife.

Lord Landimere heard it next morning. He did not mind it. He would have had to make his wrongs known to the world, and this made his way all the easier.

But poor Edna, while in her secret heart she was thankful for her freedom, felt her position before the world, as only the deserted wife can feel it.

It was a terrible morning in her life. She never forgot it. At the age of nineteen, when most women scarcely know what life means, she reached an awful climax. Alone, deserted, left without means in a strange land. Would God permit the authors of her misery to go on their way and be happy? She shuddered. She had been

true to Marcus Tremaine, and this was her reward. It was hard—very hard—to hold to her faith in this hour.

She must go back to America at once—but to whom would she go? Miss Sarah Leighton was still her friend, had visited her in New York, but Miss Leighton lived with her brother, and Henry Leighton never forgave Edna for the part she played. She never explained why she married Marcus Tremaine, nor did Miss Leighton expect any explanation. It was perfectly natural to her that Edna should marry him, though “Henry had a great many nonsensical ideas about it,” as Miss Leighton said.

Edna had always grieved because she could not tell the truth to Henry Leighton. How could she tell him what she herself did not know? But she knew it now, and on the impulse of the moment she went to her desk and wrote the whole truth to him, explaining fully what she could not explain before.

The sheets were tear-stained. They told the story of a broken heart. She was about to inclose her letter, when her maid came in to say Miss Gordon and Miss Dean wished to see her. Edna dropped the envelope and went down-stairs.

It was the first time they had met since yesterday, and Kate and Amy took Edna in their arms and wept over her and talked to her as if she were their sister.

“We have something to tell you, dear,” Kate said.

Edna looked at her. Did Kate bring any word from the man who was the victim of Lady Landimere’s terrible mistake? Kate’s face reflected bad news.

“What is it? Don’t be afraid. I think I can bear anything now.”

“I have brought you ill-tidings, indeed, though God knows I hope it will bring you consolation. Mrs. Tremaine, there has been a terrible accident on the railway, and——” Kate paused, then in a low voice she said: “God did not let them go far.”

“They are not——”

Edna did not finish the sentence.

“Mr. Tremaine is dead, and Lady Landimere is fatally injured. Vere has gone up to London.”

Edna fell upon her knees, and buried her face in the cushion of a chair.

Kate knelt down beside her.

"We are at least saved the disgrace. There will be no need of divorce now. The world will never know how bad they were. They have received the wages of their sin."

When Edna went back to her writing-desk, she added a postscript to her letter. The postscript was the news Kate brought her, to which was added:

"This morning I was a deserted wife—noon finds me a widow. I have, indeed, been spared much. God has saved me from the shame Marcus Tremaine tried to inflict upon me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GLOWING PAGE.

It was late in the afternoon of a delightful day in September. The throng had left Cape May, but many remained to enjoy the glorious weather and grand storms of September.

Among the many was a gentleman for whom Cape May had some peculiar fascination, since he declared to himself that he came here against his will, and cursed himself for a fool for coming. He had been strolling aimlessly along the beach for the past hour, and, as he had met no familiar faces, although he tried to convince himself he did not wish to meet any, he was returning to his hotel disappointed, when, in his reverie, he came into collision with another gentleman, who must have been equally absent-minded.

"Beg pardon!" said the other—"Oh, why, if I am not mistaken, you are Mr. Vere Gordon!" as they looked in each other's faces.

The gentleman shook his head, and laughingly said:

"That is not my name."

"No?" said the other, in surprise. "Then I beg your pardon; but I could have sworn that you were the gentleman I met at the Leightons a few—let me see, four years ago? Yes, it is four years, for I was talking about it to Lord Landimere—he was Mr. Clifford then, a friend of yours. Why, your very laugh is so familiar!"

"Yes, Mr. Rowley," said the gentleman, offering his hand, "I am your old acquaintance, but my name is not

Vere Gordon, but Gordon Clifford. Don't look surprised. It is easily explained. Myself and my friend Lord Landimere changed names when we were here before, for a very good reason, which concerned only ourselves, but, positively, it keeps me busy explaining since I came back."

"Well, that's pretty good, too," said Rowley, shaking hands.

"But very inconvenient," laughed Gordon.

"I should think so. Now, you should have come into a title, like your friend, and we would never have been the wiser."

"Yes. Did you say you met Landimere?"

"He was here—left last night to join some relatives in New York——"

"Ah!" said Gordon, regretfully, "that's too bad. I arrived too late."

"Oh, if you are going to stay, you will see him. He is coming back with his friends in a few days."

"Who are here—any of my old acquaintances?" said Gordon, carelessly.

"Have you seen the Leightons? They are still at their cottage. The Leightons include Mrs. Tremaine, of course. She went back to them after her husband's death."

"Is her husband dead?"

And Gordon could not retain his careless manner.

"Didn't you know it? Why, yes; was killed on a railway in England."

"I have been in India a year and a half, and know nothing."

"Oh, you ought to see her! She is the attraction at Cape May, though she keeps very quiet. Scarcely out of mourning, I believe. A widow only twenty-one, as beautiful as a dream, and one of the wealthiest women in the United States," said Rowley, rapturously.

"Truly, what more could be desired!" said Gordon, with a discordant laugh.

"Ah! there is Mrs. Tremaine and Mr. Leighton now——"

"Where?" said Gordon, trying to keep cool.

"Don't you see—on the hotel steps? I suppose they

are calling, as there are a number of friends of theirs at the hotel."

Gordon lost the explanation. He had caught a glimpse of the most beautiful face he ever beheld, a beauty enhanced since last he saw it. The tenderness, love, and resignation of that face were not of this world. He felt it even in that glimpse, yet he would not give way, nor be led by an intuition. He ridiculed her looks. It was an expression very becoming a young widow, quite the proper thing, in fact, and was cultivated accordingly.

He left Rowley and walked up to the hotel. Instead of entering, he lingered on the piazza. He was there about fifteen minutes—he thought it an age—when he saw Mr. Leighton at the door. He walked toward the old gentleman, who recognized him as he drew near.

"Why, my dear boy, is it really you!" and Mr. Leighton grasped Gordon's hand.

"Believe me, I am glad to see you, Mr. Leighton. I found out only a few moments ago you were at the Cape. I hope Miss Leighton is well?"

"Oh, yes, quite well, but—but there is somebody else with us," said the old gentleman, hesitatingly. "Somebody who, I know, will be glad to see you. It was a terrible mistake, my poor boy, and she has suffered for it, but it is not too late. Here she comes now. I know she would not have me say a word," and the old gentleman's voice fell.

Gordon turned his face from the door. He heard the rustle of a woman's garments, a light footstep. His senses, his heart told him she was near, and he slightly raised his voice, as he said:

"I will see you again, Mr. Leighton, and give my best wishes to Miss Leighton; as for—Mrs. Tremaine, I wish to be frank with you, I have no desire to meet her ever again."

He walked away. She heard, and he knew it. If it was for this he had come to Cape May, now he was satisfied. Satisfied with himself! Was he? He went to his room and walked the floor, and raved. He denounced himself in strong terms for coming here. He forgot all about his dinner, and swore he would leave next morning.

But three nights after found him at a ball given by Mrs. Durant, one of the leaders at Cape May. It was

the closing entertainment of a series given by that lady, and was to mark her departure for her city home. It was said to be very select, which must prove the select numerous, for Mrs. Durant's house was thronged.

To Colonel Gordon Clifford's surprise, for he had won that title in her majesty's service in India, he saw Landimere talking to their old acquaintance, Cora Taunton.

"It is strange that Landimere and I should come back at the same time. How I cursed the hour I came with him here, and yet it was not his fault. Ah, there are Kate and Amy! And Sir Robert, by Jove!"

He wanted to join some of them, but he was long in doing it, the crowd was so great. He made his way first to Kate, who was now Lady Conway.

To say that Kate was delighted to see him would not be doing full justice to her feelings.

"I am so glad, so glad to meet you here," she said, over and over again, as she looked at him, as he thought, strangely. "You don't know how wretched we were because you went away that day. If you had only stayed until the next."

"Then *I* would be wretched, perhaps," he laughed, not quite understanding her.

Kate knew that her brother had written a full explanation to Gordon, who had left for India the morning after his episode with Edna at the Rocks, and just then Amy joined them.

Lord Landimere was talking the while to Cora Taunton. She was known now as Mrs. Taunton. She married Count Blandenberg, and had all the glory of being a countess for a short season. In that season the count squandered her fortune in gambling and riotous living, abused her even to inflicting personal violence, then separated himself from her. She applied for a divorce, obtained it, and returning to her native land, resumed her family name.

Her experience did not improve her disposition. She was more ready than ever to say ill-natured things. She was exceedingly kind to Lord Landimere. She did not remember how often she had snubbed him as plain Mr. Clifford. Lord Landimere's memory was good, if hers was not. But it amused him now to think how infatuated he was with her four years ago. How wise he had

grown in four years! He saw through her maneuvers to bait a lord, and enjoyed it thoroughly.

"Why, there's Mr. Vere Gordon," she said, seeing Colonel Clifford talking to Amy.

Landimere was surprised, indeed, as he looked in the direction she indicated.

"Thank Heaven, he has come!" was Landimere's mental comment. "His name is Gordon Clifford now, Colonel Gordon Clifford. He also has been left a family inheritance, I believe, with a name," said Vere to Cora, telling a misleading truth.

"Well, how fortunate you have been! And he is just as handsome as ever, isn't he?"

"I hope my good fortune hasn't detracted from my good looks," said Vere, laughing.

"Oh, Lord Landimere, you know I never could think you anything but——" Here Cora blushed and simpered, and dropped her eyelids; then suddenly raising her eyes to his, she very prettily, as if covering her confusion, said: "Is the colonel married? Who is that beautiful lady talking to him? Do you know?"

"She is a distant relative. All the Gordons and Cliffords are related. She is his cousin, and I am glad you think her beautiful—she is my wife."

There was no pretty pretense of confusion now. It was a hateful reality, since it could not be concealed. She was a miserable failure when she tried to say:

"Why, this is a surprise, but I am so pleased."

Lord Landimere enjoyed the situation immensely. Cora's sweetness and attention chilled almost instantly, and in a few moments she dropped him as if he were a piece of ice.

The meeting of Landimere and Gordon was an expression of their life-long friendship.

"Thank God we meet here again," said Landimere, when for a moment they stood alone. "Gordon, I would give my life, dearly as I prize it, to make you happy. I want to hear you say you forgive me——"

"Why, Vere, I never thought of blaming you."

"But you said you felt that you had turned to a dark page in your life when you consented to take my name coming to America."

"Yes, I did, Vere—I did turn to a dark page, but let us mention it no more."

Landimere saw the look of pain, and said, quickly:

"But you have come back to turn to a glowing page. She is free, and——"

Gordon looked puzzled as he instantly interrupted his friend:

"Don't mention her. That is done with forever."

Landimere was silenced for a moment; then, to turn the conversation, he told Gordon of his experience with Cora Taunton.

"That's good," Gordon laughed.

But his laugh was worthless. Landimere noticed it, and it cast a gloom upon him. Gordon went back to his hotel long before the dance was over. If he went there with the expectation of seeing Edna, he came away disappointed.

He would not acknowledge to himself that he went there with such an expectation, yet he returned to his hotel ill at ease.

"What did Landimere mean by mentioning her?" he asked himself. "He had never told Vere he loved her, and why had Mr. Leighton spoken as he did? Can it be possible she told she was engaged to me forty-eight hours before she married Tremaine?"

He tortured himself with these questions, and went to sleep, determined to remain but to-night at Cape May.

He awoke next morning with the same determination, and such was his intention still when, after his breakfast, he opened a packet of letters that came for him. He looked over a few, then took up a heavy envelope bearing a number of postmarks.

"Umph," he said, "this one has been following me around the world. It is heavy enough to be important," and he tore it open. "Hello! it's Vere's writing!" To make sure he turned to the last page on the lengthy document. True enough, it was signed Vere Gordon Landimere. "I wonder what it is all about? Shall I read it, or get him to tell it to me—now that he is here?" He turned back to the first page, and his eye caught a name—Edna Forrest.

Then he read the lengthy letter explaining Hetty's terrible mistake, and all that took place at the Nest

nearly two years before. It was written by Lord Landimere the day following that memorable day at the Nest, and it reached Colonel Clifford this morning.

He got up from the reading of that letter, and acted like a madman. He said after he *was* mad. He rang the bell, and asked to have Lord Landimere, who was stopping at the hotel, sent to him at once.

Landimere came in alarm, for the call-boy said there was something wrong with Colonel Clifford.

"Vere, tell me, did you write that letter? Is it true? or am I dreaming—am I mad?"

Landimere, trembling, picked up the letter Gordon pointed to so excitedly.

"It came this morning—look at the date—did you write it?"

"Great heavens! did you get this only to-day? It is true—true as I have written it. Then you didn't know what I meant last night. Oh, Gordon, now that you do know, can you forgive me for being the cause of so much misery to you?"

"Don't talk to me," cried Gordon, snatching his hat and putting it on—"don't ask me any questions now. It's true, and I'm not dreaming—not mad. It's true—true!" and he grasped the letter Vere held and rushed out of the room and out of the hotel, and did not pause until he rang Mr. Leighton's door-bell.

It was a fortunate thing that Mr. Leighton was coming out at that moment, for the servant might have reported a madman.

"My dear fellow!" said Mr. Leighton, turning pale as he confronted Clifford. The old gentleman saw that something unusual had happened.

"My dear sir, forgive me for coming like this, but you see I only just found it out. I want to take back what I said yesterday. I didn't know of the terrible mistake that cursed my life and hers—see, I just got Landimere's letter."

He put the much-post-marked envelope in Mr. Leighton's hand as he spoke.

The old gentleman drew the excited young man into the parlor, for he was talking loudly, and the servant appeared to answer the door-bell.

"I see it all," said Mr. Leighton. "There, be calm,

my boy; you received your letter not too late, but just in time. You can say to her now what propriety would forbid two years ago. Will you see her now?" and the old gentleman laid his hand kindly on Clifford's shoulder.

"Will she see *me*?"

"I'm sure she will. Calm yourself, and I'll send her to you."

Calm himself? Well, he tried to—or thought he did—but when Edna appeared at the door he rushed toward her. He stopped suddenly, though, when she paused on the threshold, and his speech left him.

"Mr. Leighton told me you received Lord Landimere's letter only this morning——"

The torrent of speech came back to him, and he interrupted her with:

"Can you forgive the bitter things I said to you?"

"I deserved them all, you believing what you did," she said, in a voice so calm that it put him in agony.

"You have not answered my question. I asked your forgiveness. I would ask for more than your forgiveness if I dared."

She walked over to him, with that heavenly glow on her beautiful face. She put her arms about his neck.

"Gordon, I had such little faith; are you willing to trust me again?"

He clasped her to his bosom, and held her there. It was the only answer he could give her.

It was a happiness too intense for words.

"Vere was right," he said. "I have turned at last to the glowing page of my life."

"And may it ever remain open at that," said Edna, looking up into his happy eyes.

"I suppose Vere told you that when I consented to take his name I had a presentiment that it would be the dark page in my life; and it was. There was nothing disgraceful in our exchange of names, and it was my love of adventure that tempted me to do it. He had been entrapped into marriage by a designing girl for his name and fortune. He thought himself free from her; he knew he was susceptible, and he determined to present himself here as Richard Clifford, poor but respectable—in fact, to personate me, just as long as we would have the good fortune not to be found out—and only marry

the girl who would love him for himself. You see, there was no wrong intended, but I always felt I was a fraud, and especially so when I won you under false pretenses. Heaven, what we have suffered for it!"

"We will never mention it again, Gordon."

"My own Edna!" and he clasped her to his heart again.

What a happy place the Leighton cottage was that day! Vere and Amy, and Sir Robert and Kate, were there to take a look at the glowing page.

[THE END.]



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